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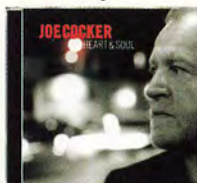
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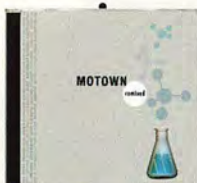
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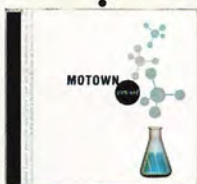
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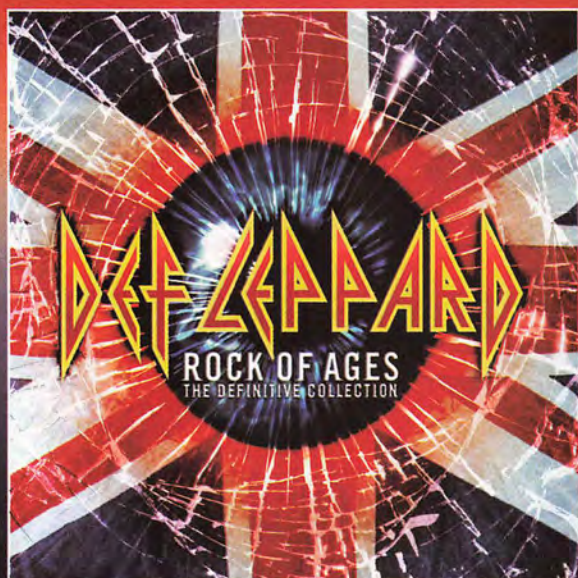
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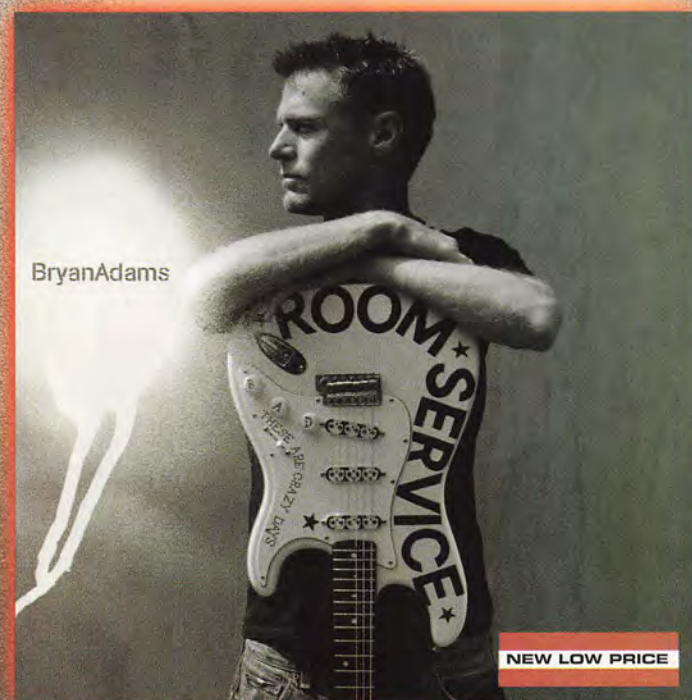
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FEATURES ➤**64 COLDPLAY**

Chris Martin thinks tabloids are "evil," the paparazzi are "knobs" and U2 are "opponents" who can be "beaten" by Coldplay's third CD. *Blender* is granted an exclusive interview with rock's Mr., uh, Nice.

70 ROCK & ROLL ANIMALS!

Sure, rockers are known for trashing hotel rooms and, occasionally, one another, but who's the biggest badass? Check out the first-ever rock & roll championship smackdown. Place your bets!

74 AMERIE

Her hit single "1 Thing" put her on the map. But who is Amerie? We spent some time chasing after this energetic bundle of beauty and we'll tell you this much: She's a star in the making.

78 SYSTEM OF A DOWN

Who wants to put on a stupid outfit and play a crypto-fascist stormtrooper in the latest video from the platinum-selling, politics-obsessed Armenian metallers? We do!

86 \$848: BABY WILLIAMS

The New Orleans rap impresario spends *Blender's* hard-earned money taking some deserving moms out to a fancy dinner. What a guy!

88 BACKSTREET BOYS

Think you know the Backstreet Boys—those clean-cut, all-American heartthrobs whose dimpled harmonies took them to the top of the charts? Well, we uncover the story behind the story—and it ain't so pretty.

96 BAILE FUNK

The underground funk movement coming out of Rio de Janeiro's notorious *favelas* is one of the most exciting—and dangerous—scenes in the world. Find out about the music people are willing to die for—literally.

"I LOVE MY LEGS, **74**
AND I DON'T MIND SHARING THEM." AMERIE

ON THE COVER ➤**COLDPLAY**

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This month: the White Stripes, the Beastie Boys, Marvin Gaye and David Bowie.

"WE CALLED OUR ALBUM *BLACK AND BLUE* BECAUSE
WE FELT LIKE PUNCHING BAGS."

BACKSTREET BOY NICH CARTER

88

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COLOR BLIND

Thanks for a fantastic Eminem/50 Cent story. But I have a question. Given that the sidebar about mixed-race partners was called "Ebony and Ivory," how could you not put in Stevie Wonder and Paul McCartney? Of course, I was never entirely sure whether Stevie knew that he was singing with a honky . . .

STEPHANIE CHRIST, VALPARAISO, IN

Okay, so that is officially the *last* joke about Stevie Wonder's blindness that will ever appear in this magazine.

DIRTY DURST

Re: last month's "Nookie" story: Who in their right mind would download a sex video featuring that bloated s---tbag Fred Durst?

DENNIS SHIPTON, FAIRMONT, MN

Stevie Wonder? D'oh!

SEX THING?

Your Moby feature was my favorite \$848 yet. But what the hell is "ear-candling?" It sounds like a sex thing.

SHARON LOPEZ, HAMILTON, NJ

Yes it does. But it's actually a procedure designed to remove excess earwax that, according to some sources, dates back as far as 2500 B.C. See? We told you you would learn stuff if you stuck with us.

GAYS ROCK

I always enjoy your "Do You Rock?" column, and Rob Halford's tales of broken noses and "redecorating" hotel rooms was no exception. But I have to say, as a heterosexual man, that any heavy metal singer who admits that he's gay wouldn't have to do anything else to prove that he "rocks" as far as I'm concerned.

RANDALL LEWIS, MARSHALLTOWN, IA

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TO THE POINT

Re: the Huge Genitalia section in your "Rock & Roll Sex Scandals": Robert Plant also has a huge cock.

KIERAN HOBERNMANN, HAILEY, ID

And you know this ... how?

PAN-FRIED

The lyrics accompanying your back page interview with Shirley Manson in your May issue ("Throw back the little ones/And pan-fry the big ones") are from the Steely Dan song "Throw the Little Ones Back." One of my favorites!

DENNIS DELEO, ANAHEIM, CA

KELLY DOESN'T

How slow is your news section? Last month you published the fact that Kelly Osbourne said her album was "shit." But I said that two years ago!

MARCUS VAUGHN, LAS LUNAS, NM

MEDICATION TIME

I'd like to suggest that if Shirley Manson really is taking so many pills that she couldn't tell *Blender* what they were, then maybe she should be taking fewer?

CHAD KURTZ, GOOCHLAND, VA

You tell her.

SANDRA DEE R.I.P.

I, my younger sister and my youngest daughter all knew the spine lyric on your May issue: "Look at me, I'm Sandra Dee/Lousy with virginity"—from the film *Grease*! Thanks so much for the tribute to the late, great Sandra Dee.

JANEANE HAMYS, STAMFORD, CT

THE OTHER KING

I just wanted to thank you for doing something I had tried myself to accomplish many times before you →

SHERYL NIELDS

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stepped in and did it for me. My boyfriend had refused to even attempt to listen to and enjoy anything by Elvis Costello. All this changed after he read your little piece on Mr. Costello [Back Catalogue, March 2005]. To my amazement, he rushed out the next day and bought two albums—on your recommendation!

JOCELYN MALKA, DENTON, TX

MOTHER SEX

Thanks to your interview with Beck, I have a whole new favorite term of abuse: "*Chinga tu madre!*" The best thing is that, as none of my friends speak Spanish, they don't know that I'm telling them to fuck their mother!

DANIEL MONENS, SUSANVILLE, CA

And isn't that everybody's dream?

BECK VS. BILLY RAY

It seems every time I pick up a magazine there's some allegedly talented person like Beck making fun of Bill Ray Cyrus. Why? If you ask me, Billy Ray has got more talent in his whole body than Beck has got in his little finger.

PETER HEINZEL, DANVILLE, IL

You didn't read over this letter before you sent it, did you?

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VANILLA SEX

Gah! It took me 15 years to get over having once glimpsed the picture in Madonna's *Sex* book of her being fondled from behind by Vanilla Ice. Now, thanks to your "A-Z of Rock & Roll Sex Scandals," I'm going to have to start all over again. Thanks a bunch.

ETHAN JOHNSON, LARCHMONT, NY

You're welcome. See you in 2020?

LOOPY

The thing I always love about the My Music feature is that folks always choose a few records that throw me for a loop. I could have guessed that Kristin Chenoweth was a fan of Dolly Parton and Melissa Etheridge, even No Doubt. But Elliott Smith and Rufus Wainwright? Now I'm a fan of hers!

SHARON LOPEZ, HAMILTON, NJ

ASK A STUPID QUESTION ...

I would like to take issue with Shirley Manson's statement that "every record, for every artist" is "full of scars." Would that statement include Weird Al Yankovic's *Greatest Hits*?

BETSY CARMICHAEL, FREDERICK, MD

You're joking. The way he reimagined Michael Jackson's "Beat It" as "Eat It"? He was reaching, dude. He was reaching.

WHAM BAM!

I was interested to read in your news section that George Michael was retiring from the music business. Not because I like George Michael. I just assumed he'd retired, like, 10 years ago.

JANA OLDHAM, CORAL GABLES, FL

Cruel. But zesty!

NEW KID NEWS



First I say this: good stuff. What strikes me is that you're smart and opinionated without being uppity. You guys, if I dare say, have class. Sure, you dis folks like the rest of 'em, but you do it with panache. However, I do take umbrage with "The 43 Most Unnecessary Artists Ever" [March 2005]. One of them was my good friend and former bandmate Donnie Wahlberg. You were wrong there. Topical, sure. But "unnecessary"? He was necessary to sell 35 million records as the founding member of New Kids, and just as necessary to Mark Wahlberg's career. Whether you're a fan of those two huge successes doesn't matter.

JOEY MCINTYRE, NEW YORK, NY

SAVE CBGB'S!

As someone who actually saw the Ramones and Blondie and Television at CBGB's—as opposed to the 10 million people who just say they did—I wanted to write and say how appalled I was to read that it might be closed. It's a part of rock & roll history, for Chrissakes!

MARLENE KERNAN, BROOKLYN, NY

SHOWER

I thought I was going to have to take a shower after reading your "Rock & Roll Sex Scandals" piece. But then I read your feature with the lovely Ciara and felt clean again.

CAMILLE O'REILLY, SYRACUSE, NY

That's good, we think.

ALWAYS HAVE PARIS

Paris Hilton saying that she doesn't care for sex is like Cheech and Chong saying they don't care for pot. Kind of biting the hand that feeds her, isn't she?

MATTHEW NANCE, LOS ANGELES

WOOF!

Do you really think readers are going to swallow the idea of a band fronted by two dogs and another that has a parrot for a singer in an issue that came out so close to April Fool's Day? How incredibly stupid do you think we are? Fool on you, *Blender*! Fool on you!

CLARENCE PARK, WESTON, CT

No, alas, fool on you. The fact is that both Caninus and Hatebeak are actual bands, although you were by no means the only reader to think otherwise.



WIN ME!

IF POP STARS WERE DOGS...

DOES YOUR DOG RESEMBLE A POP STAR?

Send us a photo with your name and address and who your dog happily resembles. If we print your photo, you'll win an iRiver H10 5GB MP3 player, complete with FM tuner and color screen to view photos!



BOB MARLEY
THE POP STAR



GLADYS
THE DOG

IF YOU NEVER FORGET YOUR PROTECTION, YOU'RE A MITCHUM MAN.



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MITCHUMMAN.COM

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BLENDER
NEXT
ISSUE

KA-BOOM!

SHAKIRA

**THE RETURN OF
THE BOMBSHELL**

ON SALE TUESDAY, JUNE 21

DEAR NEIGHBOR,

HEY, I'M GOING TO BE GONE FOR A FEW WEEKS,

MAYBE MONTHS. I'M GOING TO _____
Anywhere

COULD YOU PLEASE FEED MY _____?
Cat, Dog, Goldfish, Roommate

THANKS,
YOUR NEIGHBOR, _____
Your Name

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DISCOVERY



CERTIFIED PRE-OWNED



6.05

ALL THE MUSIC. ALL THE NEWS. ALL THE TIME

BURNER

BRITNEY SPEARS ★ FRANZ FERDINAND ★ THE GAME

WITH the smoke still clearing from the 50 Cent/Game feud, beef of a markedly less gangsta variety has sprung up between neo-New Wavers the Killers and synth-pop rookies the Bravery.

Killers mainman Brandon Flowers provoked the feud when he told MTV, "I've heard rumors about [the Bravery] being in a different kind of band," a dig at Bravery singer Sam Endicott's previous job fronting ska outfit Skabba the Hutt, when he wore his hair in blond dreadlocks.

"How can you defend [saying] 'My heart really belongs to what I'm doing now,' but you used to be in a ska band? I think people will see through them."

Flowers, who added that the Bravery wouldn't even exist if it weren't for the Killers' platinum-plus success, didn't mention his own band's "ska-leton" in the closet: Before joining the group, drummer Ronnie Vannucci was a member of two-tone outfit Attaboy Skip.

Tensions escalated when the Bravery retaliated with a bitch-slap. During an interview on San Francisco radio station Live 105, Endicott said the Killers felt "threatened" by the Bravery, and dissed his rivals' well-manicured look: "They look like wax figures onstage."

Next month, the bickering bands, who share not only an affinity for mascara but also a record label, cross paths at the U.K.'s legendary Glastonbury festival.

In anticipation of this impending showdown, *Blender* takes a look the rock rivals' résumés. *IMRAN AHMED*

The Killers (left) and the Bravery (right) have taken bitchy swipes at each other in the press.

"HIS HAIR IS 50000 GAY!"

NEW WAVE

THE KILLERS AND **THE BRAVERY** SHARPEN THEIR EYELINER PENCILS AND GO FOR EACH OTHER'S THROATS, IN ROCK'S LATEST WAR OF THE WORDS



THE KILLERS vs. THE BRAVERY

WHERE FROM?

Las Vegas.
West Coast holla!

New York City.
East Coast holla!

THE SOUND?

Synthtastic, We-♥-the-'80s nostalgia powered by dramatic choruses and Morrissey-indebted crooning.

Same as the Killers, with a dash of Julian Casablancas c/o singer Sam Endicott's boozy delivery.

THE LOOK?

Napoleon Dynamite gets the *Queer Eye* pre-prom treatment. Velvet Donna Karan suits, slim trousers, pink leather blazers.

A Flock of Seagulls get a *Queer Eye* extreme hair-care product makeover. Denim, black nailpolish, black leather jackets.

METEORIC RISE?

Yes! Formed in '02; released Island Records debut *Hot Fuss* in '04; sold 1.5 million copies so far.

Yes! Formed in '03; released self-titled Island Records debut March '05; sold 34K copies first week.

DODGY SKA PAST?

Yes! Drummer Ronnie Vannucci previously beat the skins for unloved ska outfit Attaboy Skip.

Yes! Singer and keyboardist skanked their way through obscure two-tone bands Skabba the Hutt and El Conquistador.

WEAPON OF CHOICE?

Clarins Waterproof Eye Liner Pencil (Black) \$21.00

M.A.C Eye Pencil (Indigo) \$11.50

EXCESS?

Not so much: Flowers, a Mormon, drinks Coke for "breakfast, lunch and dinner."

As much as possible: All-night drinking sessions, nonstop groupie entertaining.

SEXY CONQUESTS?

Flowers is engaged to fellow Mormon Tana Mundkowsky.

Drummer Anthony Burulcich was spotted with Kelly Osbourne. Endicott snubbed a lingering Kate Moss at the band's London after-party.

BITCHY QUOTE?

Flowers: "The Bravery are signed because we're a band. I think people will see through that."

Endicott: "[Their guitarist] looks like a little Dutch girl with a beard. I feel bad talking bad about [Flowers], because it's like hitting a girl. It's like picking on a kid in a wheelchair. He has no personality and no sense of humor."

BRavery: ED MILES/VEIP; SYNDICATION; ENDICOTT: DALLAS

ME TIME!

WHILE HUSBAND KEVIN FEDERLINE TAKES A BOYS-ONLY VACATION IN VEGAS, **BRITNEY SPEARS** GETS SOME IMPORTANT ALONE TIME.



PREGNANT WITH her first baby, Britney leafs through a magazine on a sunny spring afternoon in Santa Monica, California.



STRUGGLING WITH an unidentified object, Britney takes a phone call.



FINALLY, WITHOUT the distraction of print media or telecommunications, she lets Bit Bit lick her décolletage.

NEWS ROUNDUP

JERRY HALL has recorded a song about her philanthropic ex-husband **MICK JAGGER**. In the song "Around This Table," she claims, "You bring other women/While I'm out of town/And I can always see/When a stranger has sat down."

Recent *Playboy* model **DEBBIE GIBSON** has claimed that *American Idol* is past its peak. "I think they're reaching a little now," she said.

WHITNEY HOUSTON's latest comeback effort with **CLIVE DAVIS** has been derailed following her publicist's admission that the troubled star has returned to rehab.

WORD!



"My balls were going grey, so I shaved them. It's like steel wool down there!"

BILLY IDOL



Snausages!

Rob Thomas's adopted dog was a victim of bestiality

ROB THOMAS'S PUPPY is unusually frisky, a behavior caused by sexual abuse.

At a recent Animal Planet party at Crobar nightclub in New York, the mixed breed, adopted by Thomas and his wife, Marisol, showed his friendly disposition to every passing

pooch, both male and female.

As his canine charge jumped on the back of an able-bodied English bulldog, the matchbox twenty singer explained the pup's traumatic back story: "Tyler was sexually abused by his previous owner," he claimed. JOHANNA PIAZZA

NAILED!

DID TOOL'S MAYNARD JAMES KEENAN FIND JESUS? NO!

JUST WEEKS AFTER Brian "Head" Welch announced that he'd left Korn to spread the Gospel, another nü-metal icon flirted with Christianity. A recent posting on Tool's Web site suggested that recording of the band's new album would be delayed indefinitely by singer Maynard Keenan's decision to "find Jesus." Two days later, Keenan revealed the hoax. "I'm surprised how many people bought it," he said. STEVE KANDELL



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ALMOST FAMOUS

Annie

SAY HALLO TO SCANDINAVIA'S NEWEST
BUBBLEGUM PRINCESSBY JOSH EELLS
PHOTOGRAPHY BY MAGNUS UNNAR

MOST ASPIRING POP starlets strive to appear older and more mature than they really are. Not Annie. The giggly Norwegian seems half of her 26 years, gushing about her cat, singing the praises of candy and marveling at her own budding fame. "I had to change my phone number because I was getting awful messages," she says in shocked delight. "One guy asked if he could buy my jeans!"

Anne Lilia Berge Strand got her start in 1999, when she and her boyfriend, DJ-producer Tore Kroknes, wrote a song together. "The Greatest Hit" lit up Europe's dance floors and landed Annie a record deal. Then tragedy struck.

"Tore got really sick," she says sadly. "He got heart disease—he was only 22. When he died, there was half a year where I didn't do anything—just laid in bed, looking out the window."

She eventually bounced back and finished her debut, the charmingly playful *Anniemal*, but songs like "No Easy Love" and "Heartbeat" still carry a hint of sorrow. "I like music that makes you so happy you get a bit melancholy," she says. "But I find it boring to listen to people complaining about life. I'm a happy person!"

Clearly in her element on "Chewing Gum," a bubbly disco-pop dismissal of clingy guys, she declares: "I don't want to settle down, I just wanna have fun." But what about the rumor that she's found love again, with Finnish DJ-producer Timo, who did several songs on her album? "He's not my boyfriend," she blushes, like a fifth-grader whose crush has just been discovered. "Well, I don't know—maybe he is. I'm thinking about it..."

OUT NOW ANNIEMAL BIG BEAT/ATLANTIC

ALL ABOUT ME!

FAVORITE BOOK
The Shadow of the Wind by Carlos Ruiz Zafón

FAVORITE SONG
"I Want Candy" by Bow Wow Wow

WORST JOB
I was washing office floors for a while.
It was quite sad.

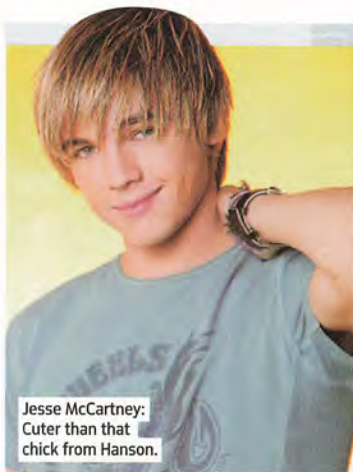
OBSESSION
I love Conan O'Brien's hair. It seems
to get bigger every day!

"I JUST WANNA HAVE FUN!"



How Dirty Boys Get Clean.
NEW AXE SHOWER GEL





Jesse McCartney:
Cuter than that
chick from Hanson.

DO YOU ROCK?

JESSE MCCARTNEY

DOES THE SUMMERLAND
STAR AND POP HEARTTHROB
INDEED ... ROCK?

Ever trash a hotel room?

One time I woke up and found out I had unscrewed and broken all the light bulbs in the room in my sleep.

Best rumor about yourself?

That I was hooking up with Merrin Dungey, who plays Susannah on *Summerland*. She's 33 and I'm 17.

Ever had a brush with the law?

I got pulled over three days ago. I was doing 72 in a 50 mph zone.

Worst rock & roll injury?

A girl yanked a lock of hair from my head and made me bleed.

Worst tour horror story?

Once, onstage, my pants fell to my ankles in front of 10,000 people.

Biggest celebs in your cellphone?

Lindsay Lohan and Paris Hilton.

Worst place you've ever been sick?

I covered this prim and proper lady on an airplane with puke.

Ever kill an animal?

I killed a deer while hunting.

Stupidest thing you've ever eaten?

Two cans of cat food. I lost a bet.

Most expensive item of clothing you own?

\$3,300 French shoes.

Who is the last person you wanted to kill, maim or injure?

Michael Jackson. If he ever came near me, I'd cut it off. DAVE HILL

VERDICT

BETWEEN EATING CAT FOOD AND KILLING A DEER, IT CANNOT BE DENIED: JESSE MCCARTNEY ROCKS BIG TIME!

→ JESSE MCCARTNEY'S NEW ALBUM, *BEAUTIFUL SOUL* (HOLLYWOOD), IS OUT NOW.

NEWS ROUNDUP

RUSSELL CROWE has promised a "fresh, revelatory and graceful" final album from his musical side project, **30 ODD FOOT OF GRUNTS**.

MOBY has criticized **GWEN STEFANI**'s recent solo debut, *Love Angel Music Baby*, for having too many guest stars. "There's not enough Gwen on it," he complained.

MARC ANTHONY has painted a nude portrait of wife **JENNIFER LOPEZ**, viewed from the rear. "It's very artistic and tasteful," said a source.



Holy Moly!

Madonna and husband Guy Ritchie wake up, offend Catholics

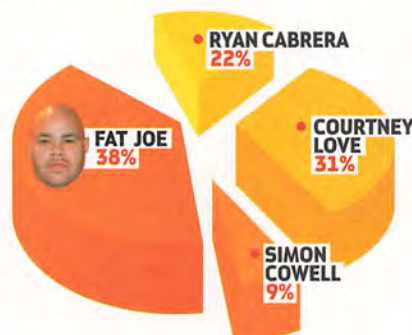
AT A TIME when the late Pope John Paul II was being fed through a tube, Madonna and husband Guy Ritchie donned holy habits for a party celebrating the Jewish holiday of Purim. The nun and pope outfits caused outrage among religious

leaders. "We Catholics thought we'd finally gotten rid of the witch when she discovered Kabbalah," said U.S. Catholic League president William Donahue. Through her publicist, Madonna assured, "No disrespect was intended." NOEL BODDIE

BLENDER'S BURNING QUESTION

WHOSE "STOLEN" VIDEO WOULD YOU LEAST LIKE TO SEE ON THE INTERNET?

SURVEY SAYS



READER WISDOM

"RYAN IS BORING! CELEB SEX TAPES SHOULD BE WEIRD AND OBSCENE."

ALEXANDRA GERGETS,
IOWA CITY, IOWA

Log on to Blender.com for July's "BURNING QUESTION."

One deserving reader will have his or her comment published in the next issue and win this **MOTOROLA V220** cellphone plus 375 minutes from Cingular.



WORD!



"God and the truth are on our side. We will be victorious."

MICHAEL JACKSON, TALKING TO HIS FANS.

Promotion ends here.

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USEFUL TIPS FROM THE STARS

STUFF AN ANIMAL

CROSS-BREED CARTOON BAND **GORILLAZ** EXPLAIN THE NITTY-GRITTY OF TAXIDERMYTEXT BY RUSSEL
CARTOON BY JAMIE HEWLETT

1

CHOOSE A SUBJECT

First, find your animal. I like to get them when they've died of natural causes. It's much better Karma. If an animal's been scared to death, shot to pieces or run over by a truck, it usually looks pretty weird. Phone the local farms, safari parks or zoos. Also, taxidermy is a great way to keep alive the memory of a beloved pet.

2

GUT AND SKIN

This is a messy job, as you have to hollow out the insides before drying the skin. Make a slit from the head to the behind and remove everything. Gently flush the cavity with a hose to ensure that it's clean. If you're squeamish, just close your eyes. Lay the skin out on a table to dry. This will take a while so grab a coffee while you wait.

3

FILL THE INSIDES

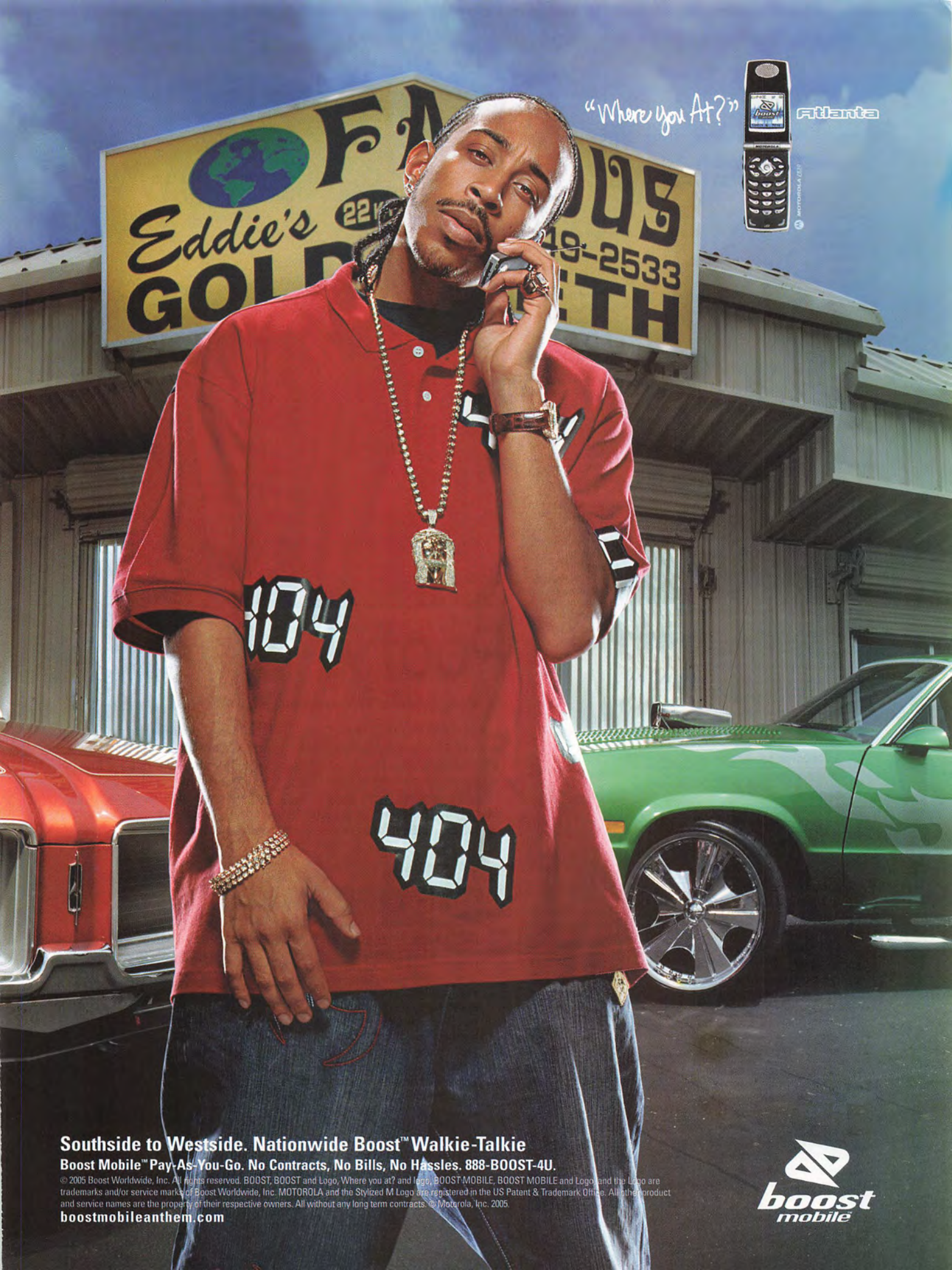
After the skin's dry (and cured with a preservative), make a mold of the animal with polyurethane foam. If it's hollow foam, fill it with beads, feathers or dried rice. (Once I used other dead animals.) Next, soak the skin to loosen it and stretch it over the mold. This requires patience, glue and a lot of sewing.

4

MOUNT

An oak, birch or maple mount is fine. Recently though, I've been putting them on wheels. Little rubber go-cart wheels. This works well if they're frozen into convincing, lifelike poses, especially when they're going downhill. Customize with neon underlighting, spoilers, spray paint and sequins for a Pimp My Rhino look.

GORILLAZ' ALBUM
DEMON DAYS (VIRGIN)
IS OUT NOW.



"Where you At?"



Atlanta

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boostmobileanthem.com



WHEN WILL YOUR FAVORITE POP STAR CROAK?

The Game prepares to greet death.



#18

THE GAME

CURRENT AGE 25

DEATH CALCULATOR STARTS AT AGE 79

CATEGORY YEARS ADDED/SUBTRACTED

African-American male -6

Grandmother served as Game's confidante, always believed he'd make good (emotional support) +2

"My childhood was messed up" (says his dad molested his sisters) -2

Social services splits up the family; Game in foster care from 3rd to 9th grades (instability) -6

Strong family ties with siblings +5

Drug dealer since grade school (dealt whiskey to 4th-grade classmates) -4

Basketball and track star, excels academically, wins college scholarship (tough competitor) +2

Booted from college, relocates to 'hood, rival gang shoots Game five times -3

Mom kicks Game out of house, his beloved grandmother dies without seeing G's fame (loss of love) -3

Gunshot recuperation spent building new (rapping) lease on life (near-death experience) +2

Dr. Dre tutors Game in writing, rapping and producing skills, becoming "the father I never had" +2

ESTIMATED LIFE EXPECTANCY 51

PROJECTED YEAR OF DEATH 2031

GERONTOLOGIST DR. DEMKO SAYS:

"If Game passes his second chance at life to others, especially kids in need, he will increase his life expectancy—that, a Kevlar vest and ducking faster."

NEWS ROUNDUP

SINÉAD O'CONNOR has been in Jamaica recording a reggae album, her first CD since 2003's *She Who Dwells in the Secret Place of the Most High Shall Abide Under the Shadow of the Almighty*.

RAY CHARLES's former recording studio RPM International in central Los Angeles is to become a museum celebrating his life and career.

An academic conference discussing the importance of '80s indie legends **THE SMITHS** was held last month at England's Manchester Metropolitan University.

Billie Joe: "Maybe I'll call my band Bad Hair Day."

GEEH WATCH!
#4

Poofy!

Punk rock superstar Billie Joe wasn't always très cool

BLENDER HAS UNCOVERED a photo of Billie Joe Armstrong that captures the Green Day mainman in a seriously un-punk stage of life.

Taken in 1988, Armstrong's class photo from John Swett High School, in a suburb of Berkeley,

California, features the singer sporting a billowy hairstyle that's more Annette Funicello than Johnny Rotten. Armstrong, 33, dropped out of school three months shy of his 1990 graduation to pursue music full-time. **NOEL BODDIE**

POPITICIAN!

NICK LACHEY'S EX-BANDMATE RUNS FOR MAYOR OF CINCINNATI

Cincinnati has elected unconventional mayors in the past—a 33-year-old Jerry Springer took office in 1977. If former 98 Degrees member Justin Jeffre gets his way, it will soon have another. At an April 2 party hosted by his former bandmate Nick Lachey, Jeffre, 32, announced his plan to run as an independent candidate. The University of Cincinnati dropout has been brushing up on local politics by attending city council events and forums. "A lot of people question whether I'm serious," Jeffre said. "I intend to win." **STEVE KANDELL**

Jeffre: "Being mayor would, like, totally rule!"



WORD!



"I see her and I think, 'Put it away, love.'"

SPORTY SPICE/
MEL C ON
BRITNEY SPEARS'S
SEXY IMAGE



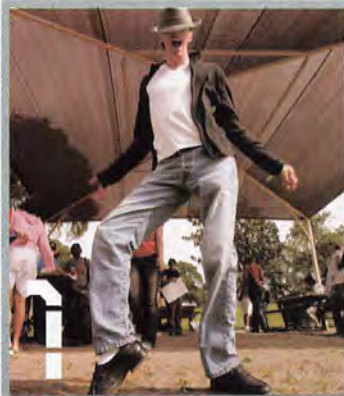
The new Jetta.
It's all grown up.

Sort of.



WACKO!

MICHAEL JACKSON FANS, UNDETERRED BY INCREASING REPORTS OF PORN-SHARING AND JESUS JUICE-SIPPING, SHOW THEIR SUPPORT FOR THE FALLEN STAR



IT'S A FESTIVAL atmosphere outside the Los Angeles courtroom, with many fans imitating Jackson's signature moves and wardrobe choices.



POSSESSING REMARKABLY similar facial architecture to Jackson, a (possibly female) fan keeps stoic vigil.



TENSION BUILDS as strange and damning details, often related to Neverland sleepovers, emerge from inside the courtroom.

NEWS ROUNDUP

CELINE DION has admitted the audiences at her Las Vegas shows are often drunk, tired or asleep. "As artists, we have to accept that this is a very different town," she said.

DAVID DUCHOVNY and **TEA LEONI** are considering leaving their Malibu home since **BRITNEY SPEARS** moved into the area. The *Spanglish* star claimed the constant presence of photographers has been "crazy."

THE STROKES announced that they are currently recording their third album. "We're overdubbing the sitars and strings in March," joked Fab Moretti in the band's newsletter.

WORD!

"I don't know if I can fully achieve self-actualization while I'm here in physical form."

ALANIS MORISSETTE



Must-See TV!

Wonder Showzen, a twisted show with puppets, but not for kids. OK?

"OUR GOAL IS to smash the state through your funbox," says John Lee, co-creator of *Wonder Showzen*, a twisted new sketch-comedy program that's poised to become this season's *South Park*.

The weekly half-hour show, on MTV2, is loosely based on educational fare such as *Sesame Street*, and uses puppets, animation and child actors to deliver enough pitch-black humor and perverted characters to make Elmo quit the business. In one particularly macabre skit, fresh-faced preschoolers experience Vietnam flashbacks, while in another they darkly narrate footage

of a tour through a hot dog factory.

First taken to the USA Network five years ago, the pilot's subversiveness proved problematic and the channel passed. "The USA executives freaked out, and said, 'Not only are we not doing this show, we're never doing comedy again!'" says Lee. "And they've been successful—except for *Walker, Texas Ranger*."

Wonder Showzen debuted March 11 at 9:30 P.M. EST, partly to discourage younger viewers from watching. "We don't really know who our audience is," says Lee. "But I don't think children should be able to watch this show." LAUREN HARRIS

WEIRD BAND ALERT

KNIGHTS OF THE NEW CRUSADE

A JESUS-LOVING HARDCORE BAND WITH A MEDIEVAL THEME. AMEN!

ARE THEY JOKING?

Hell, no. Grade school pageant-worthy costumes aside, the Knights' pro-J.C. thrashings are not ironic. Singer Michael Andrews, 27, who formed the band with three fellow Bakersfield, California, believers, goes medieval on godless heathens, or as he calls them, "secular humanists."

WHAT ARE THE SONGS LIKE?

Think sloppy, Nuggets-caliber garage rock circa 1967, as played by evangelists. "E Is for Evil" singles out the drug Ecstasy for its hedonistic, Satan-baiting qualities; "Secret Sign" is a high-speed ode to Christ.



"It's just a stigmata wound—I'm not quite dead!"

WAIT—WHY THE KNIGHT COSTUMES AGAIN?

"Most bands try to look cool but end up looking foolish," he explains, "so we go for funny." Ridiculous outfits, however, do not undercut their piety. "The Bible is full of martial metaphor." STEVE KANDELL

CAMEL

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—TO
BURN—



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Actual amount may vary depending on how you smoke.
For T&N info, visit www.rjrtarnic.com.

**SURGEON GENERAL'S WARNING: Cigarette
Smoke Contains Carbon Monoxide.**



SINCE 1913

ALMOST FAMOUS

Mike Jones

A HOUSTON RAPPER WHO WANTS YOU TO CALL HIM. SERIOUSLY!

BY JONAH WEINER
PHOTOGRAPHY BY KAREEM BLACK

WAIT A SECOND—Mike Jones has a call he needs to take. “Yo,” the stocky rapper barks into his Motorola, interrupting our conversation. “This Mike Jones.”

With anyone else, this might be rude. But not Mike Jones. The 24-year-old Houston rapper made a pact with fans two years ago, when he started giving out his phone number on records and radio shows, and he intends to honor it: Dial 281-330-8004, and Mike Jones will answer. “I get about 20,000 calls a day,” Jones tells us, hanging up after plugging his debut, *Who Is Mike Jones?* When *Blender* raises an eyebrow (13 calls a minute, 24 hours a day?), he explains, “I got unlimited anytime minutes.”

It’s an unusual promotion plan—but then, Mike Jones got his start with some ingeniously unorthodox marketing. “I started writing music for strippers to

dance to,” he explains. “I’d say, ‘Let me write a song about how fine you is and why people should tip you.’ When she get onstage, people are looking at her, but they’re hearing me. Soon, every stripper in Houston wanted a song from me.”

Packing rhymes with references to tattooed asses and, of course, himself, Jones built a buzz that drew the attention of local label Swisha House. Last year, that led to the release of “Still Tippin’,” a masterpiece of codeine-woozy beats and chrome-rim worship.

Jones’s CD is full of slow-crawling beats and repetitious rhymes, a stripped-down style that suits an MC whose name is more bus driver than pop star. Why not choose something catchy? He smiles slowly, flashing \$20,000 worth of diamond-studded fronts. “I’m just an everyday dude.”

OUT NOW WHO IS MIKE JONES?
SWISHA HOUSE/ASYLUM/WARNER BROS.

**“EVERY STRIPPER IN HOUSTON
WANTED A SONG FROM ME.”**

ALL ABOUT ME!

FAVORITE CD

Jay-Z’s *The Blueprint*. That one’s crazy!

ADDICTIONS

Money

FAVORITE SIZZURP TO SIP ON

Promethazine codeine. Forget the Robitussin.

WON’T TOUR WITHOUT

My homeys. I got eight with me right now.

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NOT YOUR SKIN.**

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Control oily skin and shine in two simple steps:

- Clean-rinsing, foaming face wash removes excess oil without drying out skin.
- Light, fast-absorbing lotion reduces shine and absorbs oil, leaving skin cool and refreshed.



AWKWARD!

POP DIVA **MARIAH CAREY** BUMPS INTO EX-HUSBAND AND MENTOR **TOMMY MOTTOLA** AND HIS CURRENT WIFE, MEXICAN POP STAR **THALIA**, AT A ROCK AND ROLL HALL OF FAME CEREMONY IN MARCH.



Mariah, who has said that her 1993 honeymoon with Mottola was spent "running down the beach, miserable, crying and alone," greets Mottola.



Having once described her five-year marriage with her ex-husband as "not a physical relationship," she turns her attention to Thalia, seated next to him.



Though she "still has nightmares" about those years with Mottola, Carey extends her hand warmly to Thalia, who stands up to say hi.

NEWS ROUNDUP

Camp '70s disco troupe **THE VILLAGE PEOPLE** have refused the use of their music for a new documentary, *Gay Sex in the '70s*, because the group is now aiming for a "mainstream" rather than a strictly gay image.

Independent label True King Records is considering signing **OSAMA BIN LADEN's** niece **WAFAH**, following the oil heiress's expressed interest in singing. "Everyone has a black sheep in the family," shrugged label head André Faria.

ROD STEWART, 60, has announced his engagement to girlfriend Penny Lancaster, 33.

WORD!



"Don't be surprised if I put out a multi-vitamin."

50 CENT



"We told you, we don't need any bloody haggis!"

IN THE STUDIO

"Politeness Is Rubbish!"

For their new record, **FRANZ FERDINAND** promise "Zeppelin-style" rawk

"WE'VE BEEN TOURING for the last year and a half," says Franz Ferdinand frontman and Glasgow native Alex Kapranos, "and we needed to get out of the city." So to record the follow-up to their 2004 platinum-selling debut, the quartet moved to the Scottish countryside, into an old farmhouse that Kapranos bought for \$750,000.

"The house is on the edge of a village," says Kapranos, 29. "It was built in the late 19th century for a painter named James Paterson—his studio is where we record. It's fantastic! Little lambs are bouncing all around and loads of birds are building nests and pecking at stuff."

And the best part? "We're a six-minute walk from the oldest pub in Scotland, and 25 miles from the

nearest policeman. Closing time isn't much of an issue."

Their pastoral surroundings aside, the world's finest disco-garage-art-punk band isn't going soft. Kapranos promises fast songs full of "only the good bits" and loud,

Led Zeppelin-style drums. "I hate when bands try and sound so fucking tasteful," he says. "Politeness in music is rubbish. That's why crunk and rap are great—it's so in your face."

And like those rappers, Kapranos vows to keep it real. "Our songs come from the lives of people around us,"

he says. "Like 'Jacqueline' and 'Michael' on the first record. This time there's one about a guy we used to hang out with who went through a rough time as a junkie. He's got a really good name, too—I hope he lets us use it." **JOSH EELLS**

ALL ABOUT OUR ALBUM

ARTIST

Franz Ferdinand

STUDIO

Kilniess House, Moniaive, Scotland

PRODUCED BY

Rich Costey and Franz Ferdinand

LAST RECORD

Franz Ferdinand, 2004

NEW RECORD

Not yet titled, September 2005

ALSO IN THE STUDIO

Idaho indie rockers **BUILT TO SPILL** are recording the follow-up to *Ancient Melodies of the Future* in Portland, Oregon.

Canadian hosers **NICKELBACK** are in Vancouver, working on their sixth record at Mountain View Studios.

Retro bohemians **THE DANDY WARHOLS** are recording *Odditorium* at their studio of the same name in Portland, Oregon.

Femme rocker **LIZ PHAIR** is recording the follow-up to her 2003 self-titled album in Santa Monica, California.





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POP STAR MUST HAVE

DUNKS!

THE RETRO SNEAKER THAT SAYS "HEY, I'M STREET" WITHOUT HAVING TO ACTUALLY WALK ONE



KEVIN FEDERLINE



USHER



GWEN STEFANI

NEWS ROUNDUP

Following **ELTON JOHN**'s swipe at the London musical *We Will Rock You*, Queen guitarist Brian May has retaliated by taking a hit at Elton John's planned West End version of *Billy Elliott*. "Billy Elliott: The Musical? The film didn't do it for me. Does it rock?" he wondered.

Packing up after a recent trip to London, **MARIAH CAREY** was forced to hire a removal truck to transport her 50 bags from hotel to airport.

ASHLEE SIMPSON has told concert audiences that her "tough year" has involved learning many lessons: "The most important is that I don't have to be perfect."

WORD!



"Liam's like a woman on a f**king permanent menstrual cycle!"

NOEL GALLAGHER, ON HIS BROTHER



Long Live Grok?

IN 2001, **GROKSTER** WAS SUED BY THE MAJOR MUSIC AND MOVIE COMPANIES, AND IN JUNE THE SUPREME COURT WILL DECIDE WHETHER SIMILAR FILE-SHARING PROGRAMS SHOULD BE UNPLUGGED. **BLENDER**'S CRACK LEGAL TEAM BREAKS DOWN THE MUMBO-JUMBO OF THE LANDMARK CASE.

Q: WHAT'S AT STAKE?

A: The Supreme Court will be writing the copyright rules for peer-to-peer software, which millions of Americans use for downloading music, videos and other entertainment. "The decision may set ground rules for a whole generation of new technologies," says Tim Wu, visiting professor of law at the University of Chicago.

TRANSLATION: Millions of mash-up enthusiasts and *Dr. Who* episode-traders may be out of luck.

Q: WHY DID MGM SUE GROKSTER?

A: Record companies accuse P2P programs of aiding and abetting electronic theft. "The Grokster software is used principally for the illegal duplication and downloading of copyrighted material," says Sheryl Crow, who moonlights as the VP of the Recording Artists' Coalition between Tour de France appearances. "Grokster is making millions in advertising revenue ... yet the artists, engineers, composers, etc. are paid nothing."

TRANSLATION: Wanna hear "Leaving Las Vegas"? Then buy a copy, dirtbag.

Q: WHAT'S GROKSTER'S POSITION?

A: Grokster admits its software can be used in illegal ways but argues that banning P2P would prevent legitimate use. "Grokster says P2P soft-

ware is not unlike the photocopier, VCR, typewriter or even the pencil—all powerful tools for copyright infringement in their time," Wu says.

TRANSLATION: If you Xerox his book, Stephen King might not sue.

Q: HOW IS THE SUPREME COURT LIKELY TO RULE?

A: In March, the justices suggested they didn't want to inhibit legitimate products, but were still suspicious of today's P2P companies. "Look for a test that asks whether a P2P company failed to take the most obvious, low-cost measures to prevent copyright infringement," Wu explains. "They'll try to weed the sneaky from the good."

TRANSLATION: Look for enterprising young hackers to find a way around said "low-cost measures" about three minutes after they're introduced.

Q: WHAT WOULD BE THE RESULT OF THAT KIND OF RULING?

A: Practically speaking, the Supreme Court's decision may not matter much at all. "Online music is here to stay and history suggests these may be forces beyond law's power to control," argues Wu. "The way Americans get their music is changing, and copyright law is not going to stop that."

TRANSLATION: Fight the power! EMILY BAZELON



IT'S BEER REMIXED.



GO LONGER.

The beer with caffeine, ginseng, guarana and a crisp refreshing taste that gives the night a whole new spin.

Lil' Kim:
"Pants on
fire" not
pictured.



LIAR, LIAR

LIL' KIM FOUND GUILTY OF PERJURY, FACES HARD TIME

LIL' KIM'S TRIAL for conspiracy and perjury relating to a February 2001 shooting outside New York's Hot 97 radio station—the same station where the Game and 50 Cent's entourages exchanged gunfire this past February—ended with Kim being found guilty on four counts.

The rapper, born Kimberly Jones, insisted to a federal grand jury that she could not see two of her friends who were directly involved in the shooting because she had her sunglasses on, but this was deemed an outright, deliberate lie. Kim, 29, will be sentenced June 24; the maximum sentence could land her in prison for 20 years, by far the longest jail stint for a prominent female rapper. STEVE KANDELL

NEWS ROUNDUP

The lawyer of rapper **C-MURDER**, who is currently facing a possible life sentence for second-degree murder, has been banned from carrying pens when visiting his client. Prison authorities believe the rapper has been smuggling out lyrics in their tubes.

The FBI has officially closed its long-running investigation into the 1997 murder of **BIGGIE SMALLS**.

According to a former lover, **BRITNEY SPEARS**'s husband, **KEVIN FEDERLINE**, has personal-hygiene issues. "He wouldn't shower or brush his teeth at all, so he'd stink," claimed Amy Woods.

TELL US A JOKE

BRUCE DICKINSON
IRON MAIDEN

"THIS GUY'S PARROT keeps swearing, so he says, 'If you don't stop swearing, I'll put you in the fridge!' But the bird keeps swearing, so the guy shoves the bird in the freezer. Twenty minutes later, he opens up the fridge, and the parrot, who is very cold, says, 'I've just got one question: What did the turkey do?'"



WORD!



"In the future, my private life will be expressed solely through art."

BRITNEY SPEARS

LIFE AFTER ROCK

Cherie Currie:
Too cool for
school, pants.



CHERIE CURRIE OF THE RUNAWAYS

THEN
LEAD SINGER,
1975–1979

NOW
CHAINSAW ARTIST,
LOS ANGELES

"BEING IN THE RUNAWAYS is kind of a blur—it all happened so fast! We were a bunch of girls living with their folks, enjoying the teenage life—and then all of a sudden, two weeks after joining the band, we got a deal. Three months after that, we were on the road.

"The best part was Japan in '77. That was the cherry on the cake because we got to see all of our hard work pay off. We were stars there.

"On the road, I missed my family. It was traumatic, but we had a good time. We took care of each other

because nobody else was. The management, Kim Fowley and Scott Anderson, used intimidation and manipulation to get us to do what they wanted. Eventually, the jealousy and rage among us tore us apart.

"After I left, I recorded solo albums [1978's *Beauty's Only Skin Deep* was re-released in

May], acted in movies and TV shows and wrote an autobiography. I had a son, Jake, who is 14.

"Three years ago, I was up on Caneas-Dune Road in Malibu and I passed a couple of guys who were chainsaw-carving into wood. I thought 'Gosh, I could do that!' I started carving, and the third piece I ever made—three sea turtles swimming around a piece of coral—was accepted into the [Malibu] Art Expo, which was a real honor, because artists from all over the community try to get their work in.

"I like being a female carver, because we're few and far between. I can carve out a couple of bears in a day. Mermaids and things like that take about a week. They're all different, all unique.

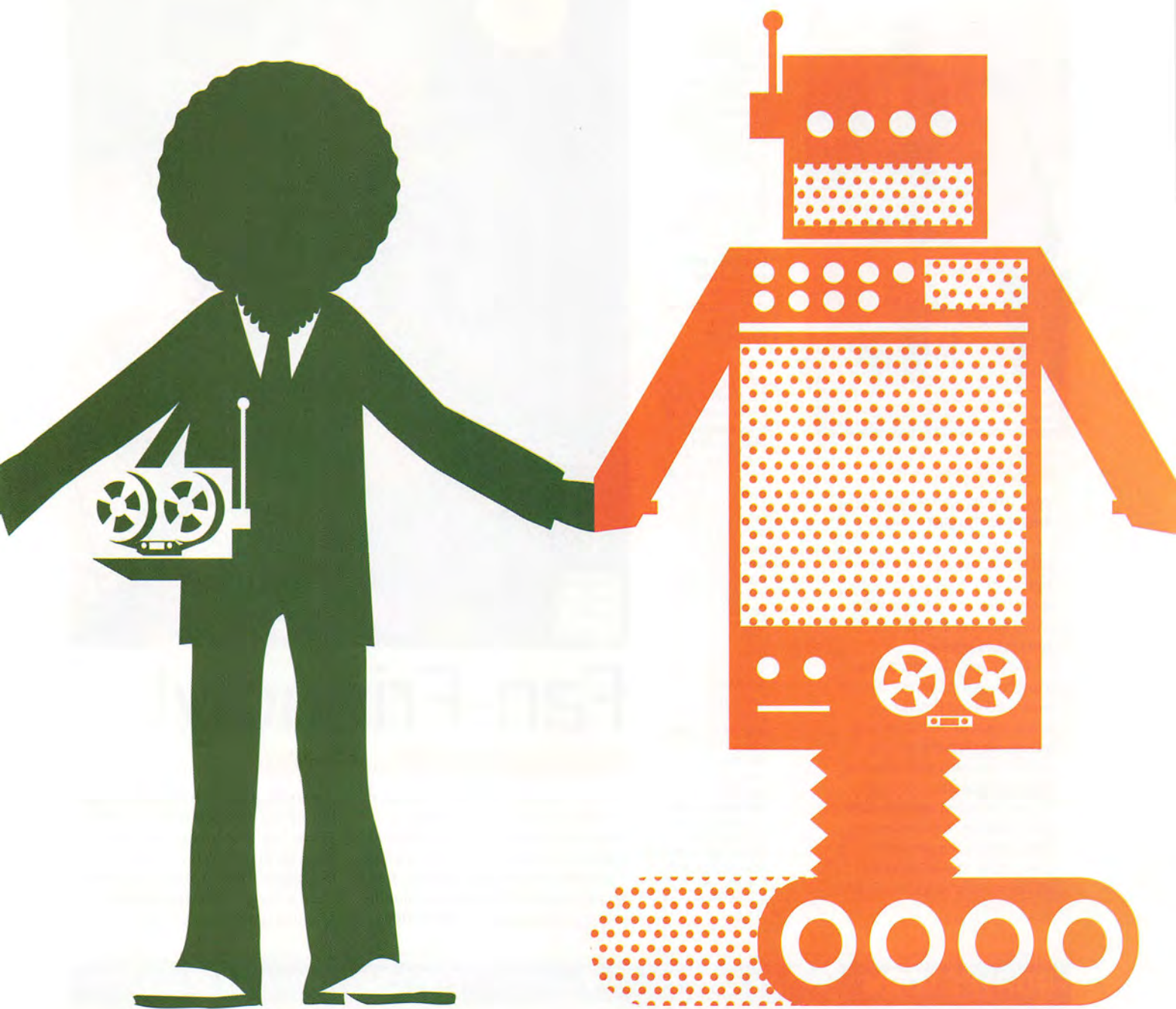
"I do all kinds of artistic stuff, like painting, but the chainsaw-carving is the most difficult. It's real tough on your body. Maybe that's why I like it so much."

AS TOLD TO DAVE HILL



"I CAN CARVE OUT
A COUPLE OF BEARS
IN A DAY."

ONEIFY.COM



**TUNE IN
TO ONENESS.**



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Heidi and Seal: next stop, Costco!

THRIFTY!

SEAL IMPREGNATES HEIDI KLUM, SHOPS AT TARGET

EXPECTANT parents Heidi Klum and her fiancé Seal were recently spotted browsing the modestly priced aisles of a Target superstore in Los Angeles.

With Klum's 11-month-old daughter Leni in tow, the German supermodel and British pop singer spent most of their time picking out playsets and tiny pants. Klum had extra incentive to shop at the discount chain, besides its notorious affordability: In addition to endorsement deals with McDonald's and Birkenstock, she is Target's official spokesmodel. *NOEL BODDIE*

OBITS

CHRIS LEDOUX
56, March 9, in Casper, Wyoming, of cancer. Champion rodeo rider and singer who crossed into the Nashville mainstream after Garth Brooks's 1989 hit "Much Too Young (To Feel This Damn Old)" mentioned Ledoux. Later teamed with Brooks for "Whatcha Gonna Do With a Cowboy?"

DANNY JOE BROWN
53, March 10, in Davie, Florida, of pneumonia. Gruff-voiced lead singer of Molly Hatchet, a Southern-rock successor to Lynyrd Skynyrd best known for the hit "Flirtin' With Disaster." Brown left Molly Hatchet in 1980 due to his illness.

LYN COLLINS
56, March 13, in Pasadena, California, of cardiac arrhythmia. R&B singer whose 1970s cut "Think (About It)" was sampled in the Rob Base and DJ E-Z Rock smash "It Takes Two." Collins released solo albums and toured with James Brown.



"DEAR DIARY..."

Billy Idol: Practicing his ABC's, double D's.

Fan-Friendly!

Billy Idol signs and then sucks an admirer's teat

BILLY IDOL RECENTLY surprised a fan by signing her right breast—then sucking on it. The 49-year-old punk icon was at a West Hollywood Tower Records in March when he was approached by a buxom blonde seeking his autograph. Idol lifted

the smiling fan's shirt and, using a felt-tip marker, scrawled his name across her bare breast. Moments later, he planted a big wet kiss on her nipple. Idol's comeback album, *Devil's Playground*, was released March 22. *JONAH WEINER*

POP HISTORY

30 B.C. TO A.D. 1997—KEVIN FEDERLINE: THE EARLY YEARS



I AM GOING TO KILL MYSELF WITH THESE POISON ASPS!

YOU SAID ASS! HUURGH, HUURGH!

Britney Spears was not the first famous woman to be wooed by Federline. First there was his ill-fated affair with Ancient Egypt's Queen Cleopatra.



SIR KEVIN OF FEDERLINE, WILT THOU LAY THY WIFEBEATER OVER THIS PUDDLE?

BUT, POOKIE, IT'S MY BEST ONE!

Next came Tudor England's Queen Elizabeth I.



I DID NOT HAVE SEX WITH THAT BACKUP DANCER.

I DID.

And, more recently, there were rumors of a secret tryst with Hillary Clinton.

WRITTEN BY CLARK COLLIS ILLUSTRATED BY JOHN JAY

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Microsoft



Choose your music. Choose your device. Know it's going to work.

When your device and music service are compatible with each other, all you have to do is choose the music that's compatible with you. Look for the PlaysForSure logo on a wide range of devices and music services. For a complete list go to playsforsure.com



20 SONGS YOU SHOULD

DOWNLOAD THIS MONTH

1 R. KELLY

"IN THE KITCHEN" JIVE



Finally, a double-entendre-laden culinary jam Emeril can knock boots to.

2 COLDPLAY

"TALK" CAPITOL



Chris Martin & co. crib the riff from Kraftwerk's "Computer Love" for some poignant bombast.

3 CLINTON SPARKS FEATURING CLIPSE

"WHERE YOU BEEN" KOCH



The coke-obsessed MCs are back with another fat slab of blockbusting menace—and a Carrot Top shout-out.

4 JUNIOR SENIOR

"ITCH U CAN'T SKRATCH" CRUNCHY FROG



Blender's favorite gay/straight Danish duo offer up high-kitsch '80s funk about getting Bigfoot to dance.

5 KANO

"BROWN EYES" 679



An East London MC taps Kanye West soul and Dizzee Rascal grime for this reluctant love song.

6 AUDIOSLAVE

"BE YOURSELF" INTERSCOPE



Chris Cornell and pals leave rage behind for mellow inspirationalism—and a fly wah-wah solo.

7 AMERIE FEATURING NAS

"MAN UP" COLUMBIA



On this early-'90s R&B throwback about telling off some loser, Amerie gets her Mary J. on.

8 ANNIE

"CHEWING GUM" BIG BEAT/ATLANTIC



For hipsters embarrassed to admit they love Kylie: squelchy, boisterous dance-pop from Norway.

9 SHOUT OUT LOUDS

"THE COMEBACK" CAPITOL



From Sweden, dishevelled, Weezer-style power pop about sensitive boys and mean girls.

10 ODB

"LIFT YOUR SKIRT" ROC-A-FELLA



From Russell Jones's posthumous album, a piano-filled celebration of life, freedom and horniness.

11 ELECTRIC SIX

"RADIO GA GA" RUSHMORE/WARNER BROS.



The Detroit fun-rawk troupe don't stray far from the gay bar with this roaring Queen cover.

12 FIONA APPLE

"USED TO LOVE" EPIC



The new Fiona album is leakier than Paris Hilton's Sidekick—this track works up a gorgeous clamor.

13 NINE INCH NAILS

"THE HAND THAT FEEDS" INTERSCOPE



Trent Reznor returns with an industrial snarl and familiar themes: people on their knees, bleeding flesh and general joviality.

14 STEPHEN MALKMUS

"PENCIL ROT" MATADOR



The Pavement mainman gets his distorted groove on, fuzzing out riffs and singing catchy lines about schizophrenia.

15 HOT CHIP

"CRAP KRAFT DINNER" MOSHI MOSHI



If Devo and Kraftwerk joined forces to record weepy R&B, they'd sound like these up-and-coming Brit geeks.

16 2 MANY DJS

"99 PROBLEMS/CHEAP SUNGLASSES" WIRETAP



Thanks to these mashup kings, we can hear Jay-Z boogie down to ZZ Top's blues-rock.

17 FRANZ FERDINAND

"MISSING YOU" DOMINO



The Scot fops take off their cool and write an unabashed love song.

18 KILLER MIKE

"GET 'EM SHAWTY" COLUMBIA



A crunk riot-starter, apparently about getting your girlfriend to beat up people for you.

19 TRILLVILLE FEATURING CUTTY

"SOME CUT" BME/WARNER BROS.



Lil Jon's rowdy crunk protégés get smooove with this bedspring-sampling funk bomb.

20 DIPLO

"STILL TIPPIN' (DOWN BY THE WATER)" NO LABEL



Mike Jones's Dirty South codeine anthem gets a PJ Harvey makeover—unexpectedly excellent.

Fiona Apple:
"Welcome to Neurotic
Jazzercise, Vol. III!"



ICON KEY



SADDOES



HIPSTERS



RAWK



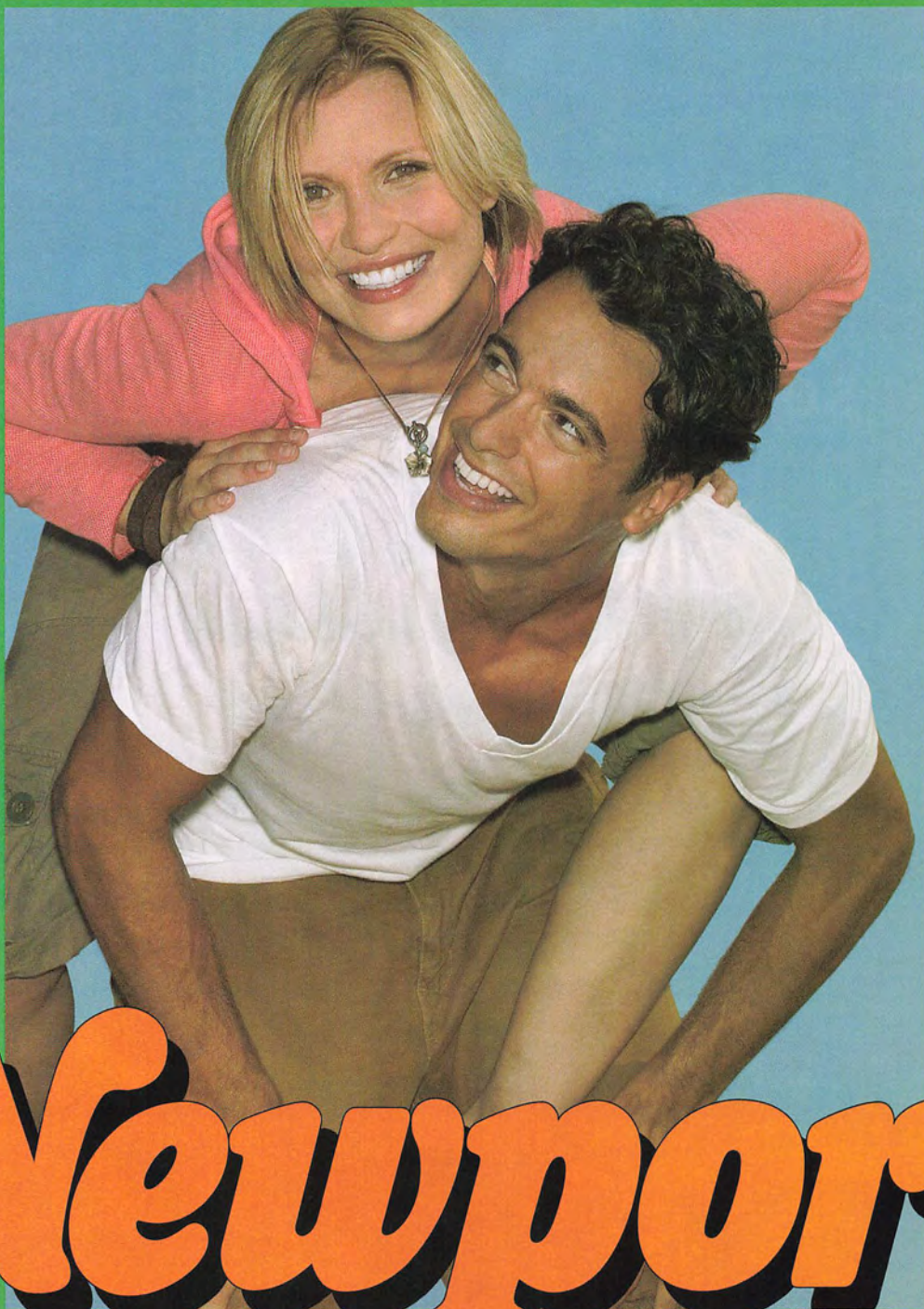
AGING
HIPSTERS



CRUNKY



SUPERSTAR
POP



Newport[®] pleasure!



SURGEON GENERAL'S WARNING: Cigarette
Smoke Contains Carbon Monoxide.

Newport, Newport Medium, Newport (package design),
Newport Lights Menthol Box (package design),
Newport Pleasure and Newport Spinnaker TM Lorillard
Licensing Company LLC Reg. U.S. Pat. & Tm. Off.

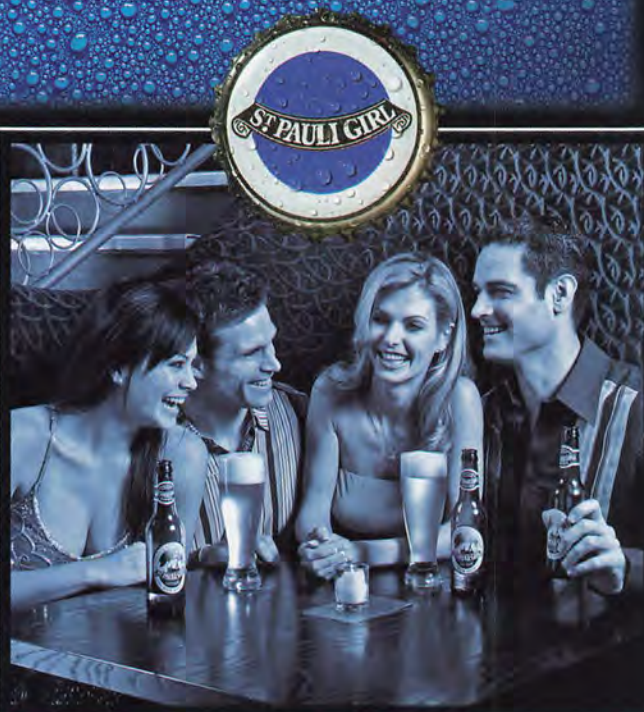
Lights Box: 10 mg. "tar," 0.8 mg. nicotine; Medium Box: 13 mg.
"tar," 1.1 mg. nicotine; Box: 18 mg. "tar," 1.4 mg. nicotine av. per
cigarette by FTC method.

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some girls to open up.

Others just need
a bottle opener.



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INSIDER

KNOWING STUFF IS GOOD

Will hears that his next film has to be *Wild West 2*.

STILL JIGGY!

WILL SMITH

GETS COMFY IN
THE BLENDER HOT SEAT P.52



NELSON MANDELA
FOUNDATION

46664

BLENDER_47

GUEST LIST

COMPETITIONS, EVENTS AND OTHER FUN STUFF WE THOUGHT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT



Clockwise from top left: The crowds swell outside the Blender Bar; Bloc Party; Jason Mraz gets fitted in a Le Tigre polo; The Go! Team relaxes in the Blender Hospitality Suite.

SKSW ROUND UP

BLENDER DUSTED OFF its spurs and saddled up for a trip to Austin, TX, for the 19th Annual South by Southwest Music Conference, where *Blender* sponsored a sensational series of events featuring some of the most highly anticipated performers in attendance.

Each night, *Blender* and sponsors *Le Tigre*, *Smirnoff*, *Zippo*, *Fuse TV* and *Cingular* hosted electrifying musical performances at the Blender Bar & Blender Balcony at The Ritz on 6th Street, the hub of SXSW. Music junkies and industry insiders piled in to see bands like **Bloc Party**, **Death From Above 1979**, **Dios Malos**, **Stars**, **American Analog Set**, **Nic Armstrong** and **the Thieves**, **Diamond Nights** and **I AM KLOOT**.

During the daytime, *Blender* held an exclusive Hospitality Suite, where bands converged to unwind in between sets, have a cocktail and pick up goodies from Blender Bar sponsors plus *The Nomad Tribe*, *Vestal*, *Zig-Zag*, *Close-Up*, *Davines* and *LoveSac*. The suite was the buzz of SXSW as bands lined up to get their freebies, including **The Kaiser Chiefs**, **The Go! Team**, **Louis XIV**, **The Donnas**, **The Raveonettes**, **Har Mar Superstar**, **Jason Mraz**, **Goldie Looking Chain** and **Robbers on High Street**.

LIVE IT LOUD!



ON MARCH 28 at New York City's Irving Plaza, Dentyne® kicked off its "Live It Loud" music experience, scheduled to showcase today's hottest new artists in over 20 cities. The sold-out show, featuring **Ben Kweller**, **The Walkmen** and **The Features**, benefited the VH1 Save the Music Foundation.

www.dentyne.com

MARCH 28
NYC

COLDPLAY "FIRST LISTEN"

LOVED PARACHUTES? Couldn't get enough of *A Rush of Blood to the Head*? Waiting with bated breath for the next release from Coldplay?

Blender is giving you a chance to get a first listen of the **X & Y** album, not hitting shelves till June 7. For more information and to secure a spot at this exclusive party series, log onto blender.com/contests/coldplay. Enjoy cocktails, great giveaways and bragging rights that you heard it first!

Capitol®



NIKKA COSTA

NIKKA COSTA returns with *can'tneverdidnothin'*, featuring "Till I Get to You." Look for Nikka on tour this summer and pick up *can'tneverdidnothin'* on May 24.

www.nikkacosta.com



DENIM DAYS

ON MARCH 12, *Blender* and Bloomingdale's kicked off the spring with another amazing Denim Days in five South Florida locations. Guests who came by the men's department were treated to refreshments and tunes from a live DJ. Customers trying on and buying jeans snagged CD samplers, goodie bags, gift cards and VIP tickets to a Sunset Sessions pool party at the Surfcomber Hotel in Miami Beach, featuring performances by **Louie Vega** and **Cirque du Soleil**.

bloomingdales





The Beatles not for sale (left to right): John Lennon, Ringo Starr, Paul McCartney, George Harrison.

MEET THE **HOLDOUTS**

THE BEATLES ARE THE BIGGEST, BESTEST BAND EVER. SO WHY CAN'T YOU BUY THEIR SONGS ONLINE?

BY ROBERT SANDALL

\$

INCE the Bea-

tles are more famous, influential and profitable than any other band in history, you'd expect Apple's iTunes Music Store to be stuffed with their songs, downloadable for 99 cents a piece. And so it is. There are hundreds of Lennon/McCartney evergreens in there, from "Hey Jude" to "Helter Skelter." Type in one of those immortal song titles and something usually pops up onscreen.

Just don't expect it to feature the sound of John, Paul, George or Ringo. As far as iTunes is concerned, rock & roll's most celebrated catalogue is a covers-only, Beatle-free

zone where blandness and weirdness are never more than a couple of clicks away. Light orchestral mutations by elevator favorites like James Last come as no big surprise. But ever heard "Hey Jude" by the late Duane Allman? Or "Helter Skelter" as rendered by New York punks Alice Donut? And what about Goran Sollscher—a classical guitarist with a series of "Beatles concertos," in which "Yesterday" and "Eleanor Rigby" get plucked and fiddled to death?

No use running off crying to Napster or any of the other online music providers. Recordings by the Beatles are not currently available as paid-for downloads anywhere. They can't even be obtained at the Beatles' own company Web site, because Apple Corps Ltd.—the company that manages and coordinates the Beatles' business affairs—doesn't have such a thing. A "placeholder page" featuring the familiar large green apple is as far as modern music's greatest pioneers have ventured into cyberspace.



The famous Apple logo, seen on the 1962-1966 best-of collection.

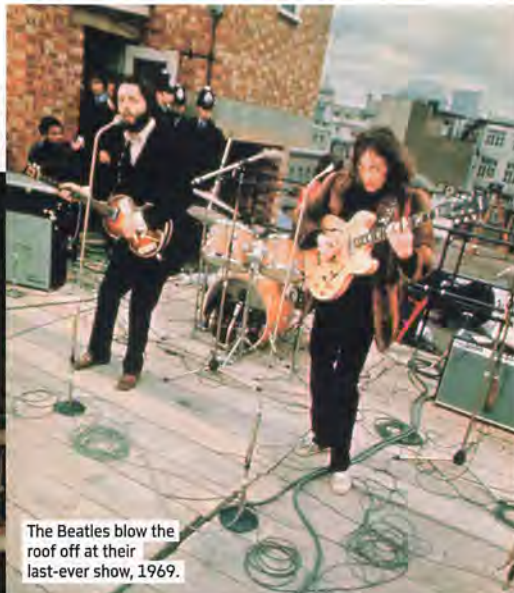
There are various reasons for this notable no-show. Mostly, though, they come down to the cagey business outlook of Neil Aspinall, an owlish 62-year-old who is rarely seen or heard in public, despite having worked for the Beatles—as humper, gofer and now virtual manager—for 45 years.

Often referred to as the "fifth Beatle," Aspinall is the unofficial CEO of Apple Corps and the fifth director of the company, whose four other principals are Paul McCartney, Ringo Starr, Yoko Ono and Olivia Harrison. Apple turns over about \$20 million in →

THE BEATLES



Paul McCartney twists Yoko Ono's arm



The Beatles blow the roof off at their last-ever show, 1969.



McCartney with Neil Aspinall in 2000.

a quiet year and up to five times that when the Beatles catalogue is in overdrive, as it was for the greatest-hits package 1 in 2001.

Located in an elegant townhouse in London's swanky Knightsbridge district, Apple has a tiny staff—no more than eight in recent years. None of them has a job title, which is part of Aspinall's creed: He likes to keep things tight and personal. He doesn't grant interviews, but in 1995, on the eve of the release of the multimedia Beatles celebration *Anthology*, he explained the Apple house style: "During the height of the craziness there were just the four of them and two or three other people. Nothing ever went wrong, because nobody was passing the buck. And that's how it is round here."

However much the Beatles and their widows might have disagreed down the years—over whose name should appear first on the songwriting credits, say, or whether it was OK for Yoko to license John's tune "Revolution" to a sneaker ad—Aspinall has managed to keep the peace. "Neil is remarkably good at second-guessing all of them," says a filmmaker who worked with him on *Anthology*. "For all of his adult life he has dealt with the world from the vantage point of the Beatles. That's been his only job, and

The current dispute rests on Aspinall's claim that as part of that deal, Apple Computer also promised that they would never trade in music. Aside from damages, he is believed to be seeking a retrospective levy from the hardware manufacturers on every iPod sold.

That Microsoft and the other online music providers don't yet have clearance to sell Beatles downloads either—despite reports of an imminent deal in the summer of 2004—is more mysterious. Aileen Atkins, vice president of business affairs at Napster, says that "it can be difficult to get the estate on board when some band members are dead," but she thinks that at this point somebody must be stalling on principle. Led Zeppelin and Madonna are the two other superstar acts who don't participate in the online bazaar. "Any artist who is still a hold-out must retain exclusive rights to sell their music online," she says. "That's true," agrees Cliff Burnstein of Q Prime, which manages Metallica. "All the major labels now want to make everything available online."

The suspicion is that although EMI/Capitol technically "own" the Beatles' recordings, they may not have established their right to sell them in the digital domain. The Beatles' contract is a lot older than most, and

believes. The only comment EMI/Capitol has made on this came from their spokesperson Jeanne Meyer last summer: "We think it would be great to make [the Beatles'] music available on legitimate music services. We would be delighted if they made that decision." Since then, silence. (Representatives for EMI, iTunes, Apple Music and the Beatles all declined to be interviewed for this article.)

Relations between Aspinall and EMI have often been tense in the past. Back in the 1980s, when record companies leaned on their artists to accept a reduced royalty on CD sales, on the grounds that they should contribute to the cost of developing the new format, he flatly refused. The Beatles were one of the last big bands to release their catalogue on CD. But when it did finally appear in 1987, Aspinall's hard line was justified: The 20th anniversary CD reissue of *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* was a huge chart success that paid the band twice what they made per copy on the vinyl release.

The idea of selling the Beatles cheaply brings Aspinall out in a rash. For 25 years he hasn't allowed any of their songs to appear on multi-artist compilations or budget releases. You seldom see Beatles CDs discounted—because Aspinall doesn't hold with the notion that you can sell more, and maybe make more money, if you lower the price. "He thinks he's sitting on tomorrow's classical music," says an industry veteran who

used to deal with Aspinall on behalf of EMI/Capitol. "This is why Neil takes such an incredibly lofty view. He's never up for a royalty break. His view is that the record company has to take all the pain. It's no wonder that he doesn't want to start selling tracks for pennies on the Internet."

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

ASPINALL HAS AN impeccable Beatles pedigree. Born and bred in Liverpool, he went to the same high school as Paul McCartney, where his best buddy was Pete Best. When Best joined the Silver Beatles in 1960, he asked Aspinall to postpone his plans to train as an accountant and drive

THE IDEA OF SELLING THE BEATLES CHEAPLY BRINGS NEIL ASPINALL OUT IN A RASH.

his sensibility has become a mix of all of theirs." The Beatles' old press officer, the late Derek Taylor, liked to put it more succinctly. "It's a complementary relationship. They had big egos, Neil had none."

But Aspinall is no pushover. It's thanks to him that Apple has acquired a reputation as a tough negotiator. The ongoing lawsuit brought by Aspinall against Apple Computer in 2003 is the reason why iTunes—a division of Apple Computer—may never be able to sell the Beatles' music. In 1991 the two companies reached an agreement involving a reported payment of \$27 million by the computer people for the right to share a name copyrighted by the Beatles in 1968.

was drawn up long before most of the music carriers of today had been dreamed of. (By contrast, their contemporaries the Rolling Stones, whose songs have been for sale online since 2003, signed their latest contract, with Virgin, in 1991.) While the Beatles' deal must have been amended in 1987 to allow EMI to transfer the records to the new CD format, some industry lawyers have argued that the Internet can't be viewed as an extension of that deal, because the Internet is more than just another of the "formats" specified in older recording contracts.

The fact that Aspinall has been conducting negotiations with the online services suggests that this is precisely what he



Apple Corps HQ,
27 Ovington Square,
London.

the group's van instead. By 1963, Best had given way to Starr, but Aspinall stayed on.

His job description was upgraded after the death of manager Brian Epstein in 1967 and the formation of the band's Apple Corps in May 1968. Apple, a self-sacrificial gesture to hippie correctness—which John Lennon called “an attempt to end artistic suppression and tyranny”—famously led the Beatles to the brink of bankruptcy. A million dollars was blown on a failed clothes boutique; more was squandered in the basement of their Savile Row office, where a former TV repairman, “Magic Alex” Mardas, installed a recording studio without a mixing desk.

To Aspinall, the only pragmatist in the building, fell the job of managing the unmanageable. When Lennon offered him the post of actual manager, he turned it down, fearing the publicity such an appointment would attract. According to Derek Taylor, “His work was never finished. Neil was stuck in the office all through the *White Album* and *Let It Be*, and he hated it.”

But the experience taught him plenty about patience and perseverance. Through all the legal shenanigans with Allen Klein, the Beatles' American manager belatedly installed by Lennon, whose bookkeeping was later condemned in a High Court judgment as “lamentable,” Aspinall kept his head down. In 1970 he began amassing a huge visual archive of Beatles-related photographs and film footage. His original idea was to assemble a biopic, titled *The Long and Winding Road*, but things dragged on a bit. By 1991 Aspinall had collected 2,500 cans of film that appeared, severely edited, four years later as *Anthology*. Apple's virtual monopoly of the movie record of the Beatles may in the future turn out to be as valuable an asset as the music. If it does, the shy and reclusive “fifth Beatle” who has spent 35 years piecing it together will not be looking to take any of the credit.

Doing things slowly is very much the Aspinall way, but there are sensible business reasons, too, which make him reluctant to rush into an online deal. After the 20-million-selling greatest-hits album 1 in 2001, the

THE FAB NINE!

FIVE OTHER “FIFTH BEATLES” WHO CAME BEFORE APPLE CORPS' NEIL ASPINALL

1 BRIAN EPSTEIN

ROLE: The Manager, 1961–1967

FAB BECAUSE: His gay soul set on fire by the beleathered Beatles, stoically endured Lennon's homophobic barbs to mastermind their showbiz rise.

NOT BECAUSE: He took more pills than the band—until his fatal overdose.

2 SIR GEORGE MARTIN

ROLE: The Producer, 1962–1970

FAB BECAUSE: Without Martin's experience with tape loops and string orchestras, there'd have been no *Sgt. Pepper's*.

NOT BECAUSE: Claims never to have realized the lads were on drugs.

3 MURRAY “THE K” KAUFMAN

ROLE: Radio ally, Feb.–Sept. 1964

FAB BECAUSE: The only self-appointed “fifth Beatle,” the demento DJ helped break the band on his WINS radio show.

NOT BECAUSE: Kept yelling, “Baby, baby, baby, what's happening, baby?!” at their New York press conference before being told to shut up by Paul.



Lennon and George Martin “disappointed” by early iPod.

4 BILLY PRESTON

ROLE: Keyboard player, Jan.–Feb. 1969

FAB BECAUSE: The funk-starved Beatles lacked groove until he added the choogling Fender Rhodes solo to “Get Back.”

NOT BECAUSE: He appeared in *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*—the movie.

5 DEREK TAYLOR

ROLE: Press agent, April–Sept. 1964; 1968–1970

FAB BECAUSE: Maintained the cheeky mop-tops' image, quashing tales of on-the-road philandering and emceeding the group's press-conference goof-offs.

NOT BECAUSE: Even he couldn't crisis-manage the bitter end. BEN MITCHELL

Beatles catalogue has noticeably cooled off. The remix project *Let It Be... Naked*, released in November 2003, became the poorest-selling new Beatles album ever, with global sales barely reaching 2 million. The reissue of *Anthology* on DVD has not been flying off the shelves, and demand for *Sgt. Pepper's* and the rest—still the most expensive buys in any record store—is described by a former EMI sales boss as “static at best.”

Some argue that after so much diligent barrel-scraping on CD, the Beatles' presence online would have more symbolic than commercial importance. But ask Aileen Atkins at Napster if her business would be improved by having the Fab catalogue at her disposal and she couldn't be clearer: “Categorically yes.” But, as she admits, Napster doesn't pay large, or indeed any, advances. “So far this is a small business. The dollars just aren't there.”

Typically, on a 99-cent download, an artist receives around 15 cents. But though online is a nickel-and-dime operation at present—accounting for less than 2% of the market—it's growing fast. Last year, paid-for downloads in the U.S. soared to 140 million, from the 2003 total of 20 million. If this keeps up, some business-watchers believe that within

five years, a quarter of all revenues in recorded music may come from online sales. “If you can afford to wait, you can always catch up,” says Q Prime's Cliff Burnstein. “And you will definitely be able to get a higher price and a better split in a few years' time.”

By then, a keen student of the long game like Aspinall should be ready to relax Apple's grip on their precious legacy. The smart money believes that the great protector of the Beatles brand will probably opt for a special online store featuring nothing but John, Paul, George and Ringo, even though Cliff Burnstein doubts it would be profitable. “We've looked at it, and the costs are prohibitive.” And besides, he says, “most people would rather go to a megastore than a specialist store.”

But those who have reason to fear and respect his combative business mind wonder whether, having taken on Apple Computer in the digital domain, Neil Aspinall may now be gearing up for a fight with EMI that could spell trouble for all the labels.

“If Neil can wrest control of the Beatles' digital rights away from a major, it would cause mayhem,” says one former EMI staffer. Thanks to Neil Aspinall, it seems that the Beatles may still have the power to change the world. [BLENDER]

Dear Superstar

YOU SEND QUESTIONS, WE GET ANSWERS. WHO LOVES YA, BABY?



THE FORMER FRESH PRINCE AND CURRENT BOX-OFFICE KING IS HIP-HOP'S MR. NICE GUY. AT LEAST, THAT'S WHAT WE THOUGHT BEFORE HE ANSWERED YOUR QUESTIONS ABOUT THROWING PUNCHES, WATCHING PORN MOVIES AND THE EXACT DIMENSIONS OF HIS "BIG WILLIE"...

BY CLARK COLLIS
PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHRIS BUCK

"THE IDEA TO come back to music is a long shot at best," says Will Smith within seconds of entering his suite at Manhattan's Mandarin Oriental Hotel. "But that's the kind of shot I hit a lot."

Indeed, you would have received long odds, when a teenage Smith first teamed up with friend and producer Jazzy Jeff, that the gangly, jug-eared rapper from Philly would become a platinum-selling hip-hop star, TV sitcom icon, A-list movie star and husband to big-screen hottie Jada Pinkett.

But it's been three years since the 36-year-old's last CD, 2002's *Born to Reign*, whose poor sales suggested that his fans had transferred their affections to more expletive-happy rappers like Eminem. It's enough to make a man (in black) angry! Which is exactly how Smith sounds on his new CD, *Lost and Found*. "Mr. Nice Guy" takes pops at gossip DJ Wendy Williams and at Eminem himself, who dissed the Fresh Prince on "The Real Slim Shady."

"Like it says on my record, sometimes people mistake nice for soft," explains Smith. "I don't think that we need to continue to make that mistake about Will."

Given that the star of *Ali* could beat the tar out of *Blender*, it seems reasonable to ask if there are any subjects that might unleash Big Willie's not-so-nice side.

"There's nothing you could say to offend me, if it's coming from a truthful place," he says with a smile.

Well, the first question comes from ...

"That's bullshit!" Smith explodes, before emitting that distinctive baritone-hyena of a laugh.

Okay, this should be fun ...

WHAT WAS IT LIKE WORKING WITH SNOOP DOGG ON YOUR NEW ALBUM? DID HE TRY TO GET YOU HIGH?

J-BRO, TUSCALOOSA, AL

Oh, that's my man. I've known Snoop for, like, 15 years. I just love that line that Snoop is able to walk—that the hardest, roughest gangstas in the world love Snoop and 4-year-old kids in the suburbs love him. Did he try to get me high? You know ... I don't know anything about Snoop's personal beliefs with that stuff. But no, we had a good time in the studio.

DO YOU EVER SWEAR?

DJ_HERSH, PORTLAND, OR

Oh, fuck, yeah.

WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME YOU THREW A PUNCH OFFSCREEN?

BRADLEYA, MIAMI

I smacked a dude in LAX a couple of years ago. I haven't punched anybody because I know how to punch now. And, if I punch someone, I'm gonna hurt them really bad. So I smack now. Because a smack stings. It was a photographer. They do this thing in L.A. where there's two photographers and one photographer comes over to fuck with you and the other one's across the street and they shoot it. So I made sure they got a good piece of film.

I READ SOMEWHERE THAT YOU SAID YOU HAD AN OPEN MARRIAGE. IF THAT'S TRUE, CAN I GET JADA'S NUMBER?

GRILLPOWER, LANCASTER, PA

I never said that I had an open marriage. What I said is that our relationship is based on 100% truth. That, no matter what, there's never going to be something that →



Never make
fun of Will
Smith's tiny,
shrunk arm.

WILL SMITH



Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five. Ludicrously Dressed Five.



Self-conscious about the overbite.

I would say or do that I wouldn't tell her first. And then the interviewer said, well, what if you were with Eva Mendes and you wanted to ... I said, well, I would say to my wife—if that situation presented itself—I would say, "Honey, I want to sleep with Eva Mendes, is that OK?" And, you know, she'd probably say no. But the point was, how can you expect to be successful in a relationship if you're not telling your partner the 100% truth? The fact that the interviewer could take that in the direction he took it showed me where he is in his relationship, you know?

WHAT WAS THE FIRST SHOW YOU WENT TO?

330AK3, ELIZABETH, NJ

I saw Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five at a place called Dance and Skates in Philly. It was like watching a holy person lead a sermon. It just felt like it was so what I needed to be doing. It wasn't like anything else. It was brand new, out of thin air as far as we were concerned.

IS IT TRUE THAT THE STUDIO REFUSED TO CAST A WHITE ACTRESS OPPOSITE YOU IN HITCH?

JANE STABLES, HAMILTON, NJ

It was actually the other way around. They didn't want to cast a black woman. But this is a really good time for black folks in Hollywood in general. I think if we keep pushing right now, next year and the year after can continue along those lines.

IT'S 1988, AND YOU'RE ON TOUR WITH RUN-DMC, PUBLIC ENEMY, EPMD AND STETSASONIC. PAINT US A PICTURE OF WHAT'S GOING ON BACKSTAGE.

CHUNKY_LOVER44, LUBBOCK, TX

God, we were having a ball. That was the golden era of hip-hop. Everything was new. Every city was really receptive. That tour was essentially set up by Russell Simmons and Rush Management to break rappers into different places that they'd never been. For example, Run-DMC and Jazzy Jeff and the Fresh Prince were staying at the Four Seasons, to be able to prove that rappers could stay at the Four Seasons. EPMD were



With Jada and kids, 2002.

doing mall shows. It was much more calm, because we had this overall purpose for hip-hop. It was a party every night. But it was much more calm than the year before. The year before was ridiculous ...

ARE YOU RELIGIOUS—AND HAVE YOU EVER BEEN APPROACHED BY THE CHURCH OF SCIENTOLOGY?

DONICELLO, VANCOUVER, BC

I've probably read 95% of the words in the Bible. Probably 60% of the Torah. 70% of the Koran. And the thing that is so amazing to me is how everybody, in essence, believes the same thing. I just can't understand how we get from such similar beliefs to murdering one another. My beliefs are that individuals have to create relationships with God. You can't listen to what the preacher says—

you have to read the Bible yourself and make your interpretation. I'm good friends with Tom Cruise and I just think a lot of the ideas in Scientology are brilliant and revolutionary and non-religious.

WHAT WAS YOUR MOST EMBARRASSING OUTFIT FROM THE FRESH PRINCE ERA?

ELROY, MADISON, WI

Aw, like, all of them! Here's an easier question: Was there ever a good outfit? You know, what was the one outfit you thought was OK? God, I watch it on Nick At Night and it's amazing that I became famous from that. I think I was trying to have as bad an outfit as I could possibly have.

WAS THERE A POINT WHERE YOU EVER GOT SICK OF THE WORD JIGGY?

A-KOS, LAKE ELSINORE, CA

Yeah. Right now. Ha! It was crazy. Jerry Seinfeld really launched that record. People were liking it, but as soon as Jerry Seinfeld said "jiggy" on the show it just went through the roof.

DO YOU LET YOUR KIDS LISTEN TO GANGSTA RAP?

GIGANTIC, JUPITER, FL

I don't shield my kids from any of that stuff. They listen to everything. But they do all the clean versions. You can go on the iTunes music store and download clean versions of everything.

I JUST FOUND A PORN MOVIE CALLED SIX DEGREES OF PENETRATION. IS IT TRUE THAT YOU WATCH ALL THE PORN VERSIONS OF YOUR MOVIES, AND DO YOU REMEMBER THAT ONE?

FRESHMAN_PRINCE, CHAPEL HILL, NC

I always see those. People always send them to me, like the stars of the movies send them, like I'd enjoy it. There were a couple that were pretty bad. *Men in Back*—that was no good. It's like, come on, man, don't do that to my movie!

HAVE YOU EVER THOUGHT OF GETTING YOUR EARS FIXED?

THEREALRAMONA, ALBANY, NY

Oh, they are fixed. They're as good as they could possibly be. Anything I did to them would take something away from them.

DID YOU EVER TRY TO GET TOMMY LEE JONES INTO HIP-HOP?

AGENTJ, NEWTON, MA

Oh, yeah. Because I would blast the music every morning, that's how I would kind of get myself started. And Tommy—he starts his days quietly. But he could hear the music in his trailer. He came in one morning, I'm blasting the music, and he said [drops into pitch-perfect Tommy Lee Jones impression], "Will, I need you to get me →

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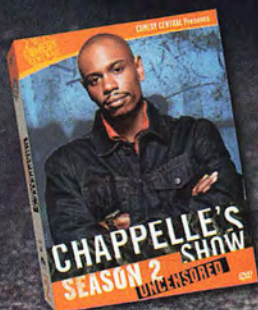


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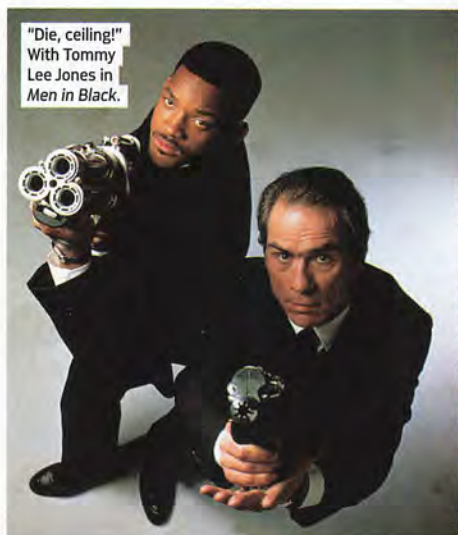
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JIGGY!

Jerry Seinfeld:
"I hate those
Queer Eye guys!"

a package of all this rap music—'cause I either have to start liking it or I'm gonna end up killing your ass."

WHO'S THE CRAZIEST ACTOR YOU'VE EVER WORKED WITH?

JJ666, RICHMOND, VA

Crazy. Crazy in what sense? [*Blender*: "The 'Gary Busey' sense."] Actually, I worked with Gary Busey's son, Jake, on *Enemy of the State*, and Gary was on the set one day. And ... uh ... Gary's ... that's a powerful dude, there. But the thing about acting and artistry is, you kind of want to be a little crazy, because it takes you off center and your choices are different. Martin Lawrence, for example, is just beautifully, comedically off. How he sees the world—it's bizarre. But that's what creates the perfection in his comedy.

IS THAT YOUR REAL LAUGH?

MJ STOUT, OAK PARK, IL

[*Genuinely insulted*] Yeah, that's my real laugh! I only have one. Like, I enjoy stuff. So, when I let it rip, it's ripped.

WHAT KIND OF DRUNK ARE YOU?

YELLOWBASTARD, DUNWOODIE, GA

I think I have an allergy to alcohol. If I drink four sips, I'm gone. It's a wrap. I just get really silly, but if I drink too much I go to sleep. So, I'm a very sleepy drunk.

HOW BIG IS YOUR BIG WILLIE?

APOLLO_CREED, LOUISVILLE, KY

Tell me what the perfect answer to that question is. Like, what is the one that I don't look like a damn fool. [*Blender*: "Big enough?"] Yeah, I'll use that one.

"I WOULD SAY

'HONEY, I WANT TO SLEEP WITH EVA MENDES.'

AND, YOU KNOW,
SHE'D PROBABLY SAY NO."

DID YOU EVER GET THE CHANCE TO HANG OUT WITH TUPAC?

DAVID_GUTZ_Y2K@YAHOO.COM

Yeah, Tupac and Jada went to school together, so they were friends for a lot of years. He always viewed what I had and what I created as where he would have gone, under different circumstances, you know. I looked at him the same way. With different influences I absolutely, you know, I would have viewed the world the way that he viewed the world. So we had a real admiration for one another.

YOU ALMOST WENT TO M.I.T. EINSTEIN'S THEORY OF RELATIVITY—WHAT'S UP WITH THAT?

HENDU44, MILWAUKEE

I've studied it for a lot of years. It's a very interesting concept. But it kind of destroys

all of our basic, mechanistic views of mathematics. It's difficult to get your head around. But I understand it as much as a hard-headed mechanistic thinker can.

HAVE YOU EVER BEEN ARRESTED?

JIGGYPIGGY, SAN DIEGO

Only once, but it wasn't my fault. That's what they all say! But it *wasn't* my fault. This is back in Philly. One of my buddies beat up this dude, and I was there. That's my story and I'm sticking to it.

WHEN FRESH PRINCE CAST MEMBER ALFONSO RIBEIRO TURNS UP ON YOUR CALLER ID, DO YOU TAKE THE CALL?

JONNY_WOLF, ASPEN, CO

Oh, that's my man! Alfonso directs a few episodes of [Will-and-Jada-created TV show] *All of Us* every year. And we just sold a TV show that he's going to star and direct in.

WHAT HAVE YOU GOT PLANNED FOR THE REMAINING 994 YEARS OF THE MILLENNIUM?

GOOTER, OAKLAND, CA

Ha! Let me concentrate on the next six months right now. I feel like I can shake them up a little bit with this album. I think people will be really surprised when they listen to some of the tracks. I view myself as a new artist. I've never been this talented musically before.

HEY, BIG WILLIE, WERE YOU A HIT WITH THE LADIES BEFORE YOU WERE FAMOUS?

LITTLE FISH, BLOOMFIELD HILLS, MI

Yeah. You know, a friend of mine, we always have that argument. He tells me that he's more handsome than I am and that I only get girls because I'm famous. I say, no, that's what you don't understand. You've got a bit of a miscomprehension there. I'm famous *because* I get girls. [*Blender*]



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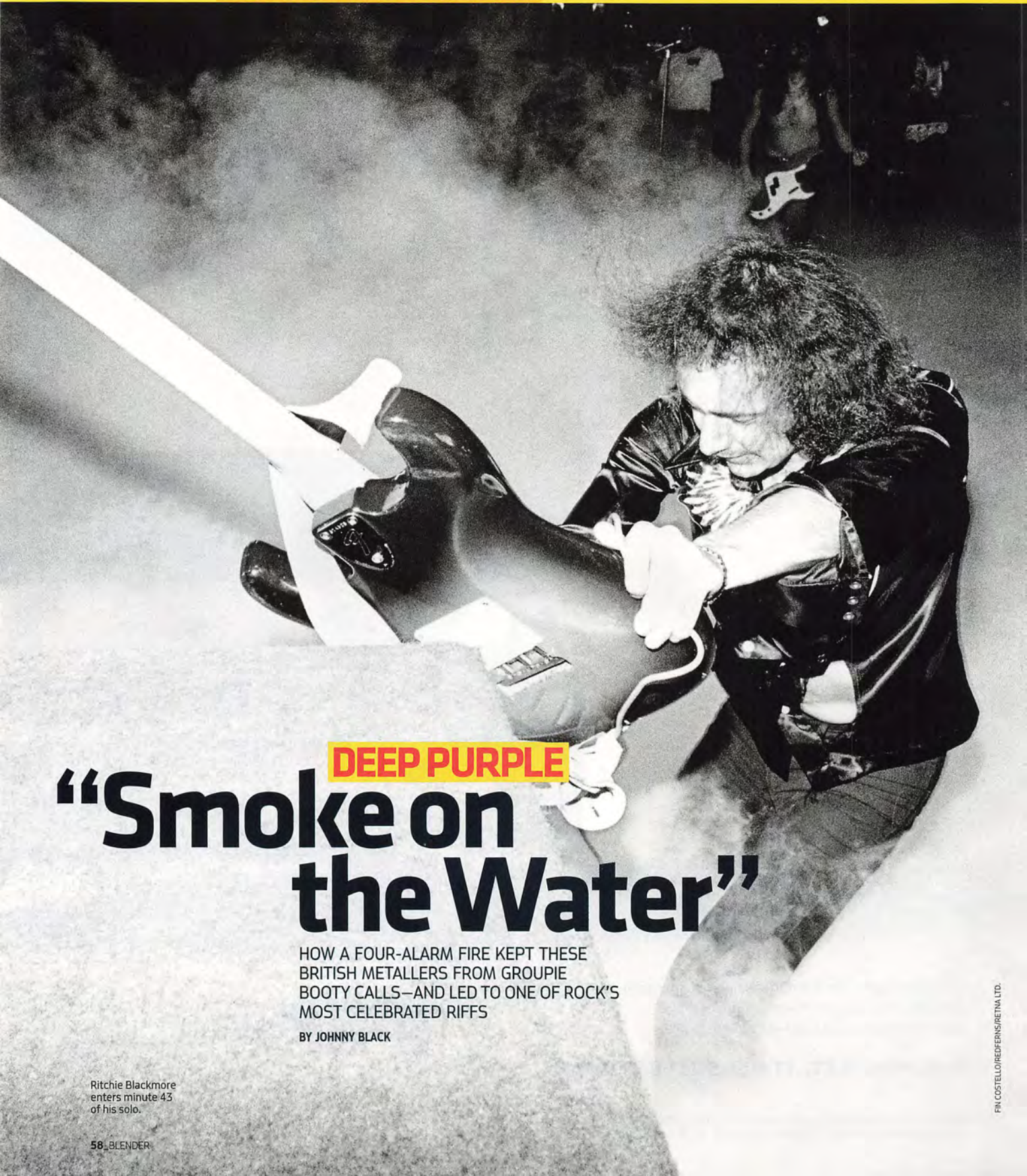
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DEEP PURPLE

“Smoke on the Water”

HOW A FOUR-ALARM FIRE KEPT THESE BRITISH METALLERS FROM GROUPIE BOOTY CALLS—AND LED TO ONE OF ROCK’S MOST CELEBRATED RIFFS

BY JOHNNY BLACK

Ritchie Blackmore enters minute 43 of his solo.



DURH DURH DURH! DURH-DURH DE DURH! The ominous metal riff that groans at the start of "Smoke on the Water" is acknowledged as one of the

greatest rock riffs of all time by fans, critics and Beavis and Butthead—but it never could have happened without Frank Zappa, a flare gun and a flaming casino.

Having decided to record their seventh album, *Machine Head*, in Switzerland, Deep Purple descended on the tiny lake-side resort of Montreux in late 1971. The British band, formed in 1968, had recently abandoned their early aesthetic—fusions of classical music and rock that had yielded such clunkers as *Concerto for Group and Orchestra*—for a harder sound.

Switzerland wasn't exactly famous for recording facilities, but the band were bored with the sterility of studio sound and hankering for live ambience. They were friendly with Claude Nobs—destined to become "Funky Claude" in the song's lyrics—who ran the Montreux Jazz Festival. "He suggested that we should check out the Casino where they held the festival," remembers singer Ian Gillan. "It was a fair-sized hall, a beautiful old wooden building on the banks of Lake Geneva." The idea was to borrow the Rolling Stones' state-of-the-art mobile recording truck, park it outside the casino and perform (virtually) live inside.

On the night they arrived, December 3, 1971, Frank Zappa's Mothers of Invention were playing in the Casino, so Gillan and his bandmates trooped along to check out the show and the hall's acoustics.

"It was a great show," Gillan recalls, "until some guy pulled up outside in a big car. There was virtually no security at concerts in those days, so he was able to walk straight into the hall, and he pulled out a Vervey pistol, one of those old distress flare guns. Nobody took any particular notice of him, because anything was likely to happen at a Frank Zappa gig, so it seemed like a happening when he suddenly appeared and fired this thing up towards the ceiling."

Two thousand pairs of eyes turned upwards as a brilliant, incendiary light shot up and lodged itself in a decorative cornice. The crowd assumed it was all just part of the fun—until a raging fire took hold and smoke began to fill the auditorium. "Zappa was brilliant," says Gillan. "He stopped the band, and started calmly directing everybody to leave the building in an orderly fashion."

Despite Zappa's advice, panic ensued. This was to the particular dismay of guitarist Ritchie Blackmore, who was in the bar with a well-endowed young lady:

"People were running past me with white faces. I presumed it must be an intermission and they were going to get ice creams until I saw the smoke coming out and realized something was wrong. Otherwise I'd have been with this certain young lady in some kind of cupboard, up to some sort of mischief, and I would have been burnt down with the place."

Ian Gillan remembers a particularly horrifying moment. "The plate-glass windows exploded out with the heat, and some kids tried to jump through to safety, but they got pretty bad lacerations." Others ran in confusion through the wrong doors and became lost in the basement where, fortunately, "Funky" Claude Nobs found them and led them to safety.

Half an hour later, with everyone safely outside, the members of Deep Purple watched flames licking 200 feet into the air as the Casino turned into an inferno. Returning to their hotel, Gillan remembers, "We could see the Casino burning from our windows. We were watching the smoke roll out over Lake Geneva, and Roger wrote the words 'smoke on the water' on a paper napkin right then. We didn't have a song at this point; it was just those words."

Bassist Roger Glover disputes Gillan's version, claiming the song came to him three days later. "I woke up sweating all over and actually said 'smoke on the water' aloud to myself," he says. "The next day, I suggested that we write a song about what happened to us."

Meanwhile, Claude Nobs saved the group's bacon, arranging for them to record their album in Montreux's Grand Hotel. Moving into the Grand, they immediately got off to a flying start, penning the famous guitar lead almost instantly. "It was a riff that Ritchie put down," says Jon Lord. "Its working title was 'Durh Durh Durh.'"

The song was laid down in a hurry—in

only four takes, according to Blackmore—because the band knew that the police were on their way to throw them out of the hotel, which was technically closed for redecoration. "We were waking up the neighbors five miles away because the sound was echoing through the mountains," he says. "We had just finished it when the police burst in and said we had to stop, and since we'd finished, we did."

All that remained was to couple the track to Glover's lyric about the fire—but when it was finished, the band were unimpressed. "We were really approaching it as just a throw-away," reveals Gillan, "a filler track to finish the album off." They also felt that the title, "Smoke on the Water," sounded too much like a drug reference, and concluded that it would probably be best to consign the song to the vaults. Despite the band's apathy, "Smoke on the Water" was chosen as a single and entered the *Billboard* charts on June 16, 1973, where it peaked at No. 4, going gold just two months later.

Over the years, the song has attained all-time-classic status. Blackmore's sludgy lick was chosen as the No. 4 Greatest Riff Ever in *Total Guitar* magazine, and a new generation of rock fans saw Jack Black pay it homage in 2003's *School of Rock*.

As Gillan points out, "It became one of the most successful things we ever did." It was certainly the most imitated: New Wave goofballs Mental As Anything covered it, the song was reggae-fied by a novelty group called Dread Zeppelin and crooner Pat Boone re-envisioned it as a lounge number for his *In a Metal Mood* album. Gillan's favorite interpretation, however, remains the one by "a South American stripper" he watched performing "the bump 'n' grind to this really rinky-dink little version." [BLENDER]

VITAL STATISTICS

SONG: "Smoke on the Water"

ARTIST: Deep Purple

LABEL: Warner Bros.

PERFORMERS:

Ritchie Blackmore:

guitar

Ian Gillan: vocals

Jon Lord:

keyboards

Roger

Glover: bass

Ian Paice:

drums

PRODUCER:

Martin Birch

CHARTED: June 16,

1973

HIGHEST CHART

POSITION: 4

WEEKS ON CHART: 16



WHO'S WHO

RITCHIE BLACKMORE

Guitar legend Blackmore has been in and out of Deep Purple over the years, worked with a solo project called Rainbow and lately embraced medieval acoustic music.

IAN GILLAN

Purple's second vocalist, he completed their classic lineup, but after bitter in-fighting quit to pursue a successful solo career.

ROGER GLOVER

Welsh bass wiz, quit the band in 1973 after falling out with Blackmore, and subsequently produced albums by Judas Priest and Nazareth.

Deep Purple, clockwise from top left: Ritchie Blackmore, Roger Glover, Ian Paice, Jon Lord, Ian Gillan.

INSIDER

My Music

OUR FAVORITE STARS' FAVORITE RECORDS

"I MIGHT GET A

MOHAWK!"

HE USED TO PLAY THE CLASH WHILE DOING MYSTERIOUS THINGS IN "DINGY ROOMS." BUT THESE DAYS, SILVER-HAIRED CNN ANCHOR **ANDERSON COOPER** LISTENS TO THE SCISSOR SISTERS ... IN BAGHDAD!

BY CLARK COLLIS
PHOTOGRAPHY BY NATHANIEL WELCH



THE ALBUM THAT

EVEN MY MOM LOVED



**JOHNNY CASH
AT FOLSOM PRISON**
COLUMBIA/LEGACY, 1968

"I grew up listening to Johnny Cash. My mom [clothing designer and author Gloria Vanderbilt] used to play him all the time in the car. And this album is just great. 'I shot a man in Reno just to watch him die'—the fact that he can get away with singing that in a prison, it's pretty amazing. For some reason, the other thing my mom would play was Neil Diamond. She had the same song on a loop so it would play 10 times in a row. It was horrific."

THE ALBUM THAT

DROWNS OUT SNIPER FIRE



**THE CLASH
LONDON CALLING**
EPIC/LEGACY, 1979

"This always takes me back to high school and spending weekends in dingy rooms. Would I like to elaborate on that? I think it's best if I don't. On the road into Sarajevo, during the war, I used to put the Clash in the dashboard because you were exposed to snipers and you were just holding on screaming. The Clash seemed very appropriate. I'm sure Joe Strummer would have approved."

THE ALBUM THAT

IS GREAT—BUT BORING



**VIOLENT FEMMES
VIOLENT FEMMES**
SLASH/RHINO, 1983

"I get bored of this very quickly—and a long time will elapse before I listen to it again. But it was my college album. I first heard it there and there was an aggression to it and an in-your-face aspect to it that I really liked. And I really loved the plaintive wailing of the singer. I was on the rowing team at college and I was obsessed with doing that. I was kind of lame."

THE ALBUM THAT

WE MUST THANK THE FRENCH FOR



**VARIOUS ARTISTS
HÔTEL COSTES 5**
WAGRAM, 2002

"The Hôtel Costes albums are basically DJ CDs from this hotel in Paris. They're very loungey, with this really interesting mix of old Marlene Dietrich-type songs but with a house beat. It is my attempt to unite us and the French! About a year ago I walked by the actual Hôtel Costes, but I was so intimidated by its coolness I didn't even step inside. The CD is just far cooler than I am."

THE ALBUM THAT

DAN RATHER WOULDN'T LIKE



**SCISSOR SISTERS
SCISSOR SISTERS**
UNIVERSAL, 2004

"They're my new favorite group. I've known the lead singer, Jake Shears, since before he was in the band—we met through mutual friends. He's got a great voice. I listened to the Scissor Sisters in Baghdad for sheer escapism. I listen to music wherever I go, but I don't think many anchormen do. I don't suppose Dan Rather is a big Scissor Sisters fan. He would probably cop to Springsteen more, I think."

THE ALBUM THAT

LET ME AGE GRACEFULLY



**STAN GETZ AND
JOÃO GILBERTO
GETZ/GILBERTO**
VERVE, 1963

"This is a great bossa nova jazz album. And, like the Hôtel Costes album, it has that atmosphere of mature cool about it that I like. My hair started going gray very young, and I just couldn't pretend to be a kid anymore. On the other hand, all through high school I had a Flock of Seagulls haircut. And I still think about getting a mohawk—but I'm not sure CNN would go for it."

THE ALBUM THAT

IS BETTER THAN SEEING A SHOW



**IKE & TINA
TURNER
WHAT YOU HEAR IS
WHAT YOU GET**
CAPITOL, 1971

"Their rendition of 'Proud Mary' is just fantastic, and I particularly like it when she's talking at the beginning about how they don't do anything nice and easy—they do everything rough. There are a few live albums on this list, but I actually don't like going to shows—I don't like crowds and I never know what to do. Are you supposed to dance? Stand there? I just end up debating that for the entire show."

THE ALBUM FROM

THE COOLEST PLACE ON EARTH



**MARISA MONTE
MEMÓRIAS CRÔNICAS
E DECLARAÇÕES
DE AMOR**
EMI, 2000

"She's Brazilian. I think the biggest she ever got here was recording something with David Byrne. This album is just very much like being on a beach in Copacabana or Ipanema. I've spent time in Brazil, it's one of my favorite places, and this really takes me back there. The country is this really interesting mix of cultures and ethnic groups. Brazil is the coolest place on the planet."

THE ALBUM THAT

I DON'T UNDERSTAND



**RADIOHEAD
I MIGHT BE WRONG**
CAPITOL, 2001

"I don't know them as well as a lot of people do, but I think they have an interesting, different sound. I like to have a mix of different stuff on my iPod and they have a completely different sound from the other things that I would normally listen to. I don't understand what he's singing about all that often. But that's OK. You know, Marisa Monte sings in Portuguese, so it doesn't bother me."

THE ALBUM THAT

I CAN'T STAND



**THE WHO
TOMMY**
MCA, 1969

"I was always ashamed to say I didn't like Tommy. I've only recently felt comfortable enough to admit it. To be honest, I don't think I've ever listened to the whole thing. I don't get concept albums in general; there's something about them I just don't respond to. I don't have the patience to listen to the whole thing. Maybe I have ADD or something. But I have nothing against the disabled—or pinball machines."

Ask Blender

SOLVING POP CONUNDRUMS SINCE 2001

ANY TRUTH TO THE RUMOR THAT ROD STEWART MAKES A SECRET GUEST APPEARANCE SOMEWHERE ON DAVID BOWIE'S DIAMOND DOGS ALBUM?

BILLY NELSON, CHAPEL HILL, NC

Yes. But, contrary to hearsay, Stewart never actually sings a note. The rumor first surfaced because Stewart and his Faces bandmate Ronnie Wood hung out with Bowie during the album's 1974 sessions in London's Olympic studios (Wood provides lead guitar on the recently released outtake "Growin' Up").

But for the opening of the title track, Bowie simply culled some crowd noises from the Faces live album *Coast to Coast: Overture and Beginners*. You can just about hear Rod greeting his fans with a "Hey!" before the studio-bound Bowie cuts in to shout: "This ain't rock & roll! This is genocide!"

WHO WAS THE FIRST POP GROUP TO USE A SITAR? WAS IT THE BEATLES?

LOUISE MITCHELL, OMAHA, NE

Yes and no. Released in late 1965, the Beatles' "Norwegian Wood" usually gets the credit for opening rock to Eastern psychedelic sounds—but many rockers had already caught the Indian bug. The Yardbirds hired a sitarist to play at a February session for "Heart Full of Soul" before deciding guitarist Jeff Beck's fuzztone pedal effect—which made his instrument resemble a sitar—sounded more powerful. In June the song became the first Indian-influenced rock hit—beating the Kinks' "See My Friends" by a month (Ray Davies had asked his brother Dave to emulate an Eastern drone after a brief Indian tour stopover in December 1964).

George Harrison first dabbled with a sitar on the set of *Help!*, in a scene set in an Indian restaurant in April 1965. In August, on a joint acid trip with the Byrds, Harrison and John Lennon were impressed by the Indian "raga" lines David Crosby played them on a 12-string guitar. Inspired, Harrison bought a sitar, which he famously used on "Norwegian Wood," recorded in October to become—that's right!—the first rock/sitar fusion ever released.

HOW LONG WERE JACK AND MEG WHITE MARRIED?

CARY PROTECH, ROCHESTER, NY

In 2001 the *Detroit Free Press* revealed to the



Sadly, the White Stripes were not named prom king and queen.



Once again, the Beastie Boys' influence on Eminem is made apparent.

KOOL MOE DEE WAS NO FAN OF THE BEASTIE BOYS.

wider world what was common local knowledge: The White Stripes duo were not the youngest two children in a Catholic family of 10, as they'd often told interviewers, but a divorced couple. The unearthed legal certificates proved they were joined in matrimony on September 4, 1996, and that their divorce was finalized in March 2000. Jack and Meg concocted the sibling story to stop the press from prying into their private affairs. So, er, that was successful.

HOW DID MARVIN GAYE EVER END UP LIVING IN OSTEND, BELGIUM?

COLEMAN ESCOTT, PROVIDENCE, RI

It was certainly a strange place for a Motown love god to find himself. But by 1981, three years before his murder, Gaye was in a strange place generally. Hoping to beat his massive coke problem, he traveled to the small port city. With the country's tough drug laws providing incentive, Gaye adopted a

IS IT TRUE THAT THE BEASTIE BOYS ONCE HAD A BEEF WITH KOOL MOE DEE?

GILLIAN HARRIS, MADISON, WI

Not really. The Brooklyn boys' confrontation with the old-school rap legend was small fry compared with his earlier tussles with rivals Busy Bee and LL Cool J. Kool Moe Dee just marked them very low in the infamous rapper's report cards included on the sleeve of his 1987 album, *How Ya Like Me Now*.

Analyzing the skills of the scene's main rappers, Dee awarded scores for various categories like Articulation and Stage Presence. With low scores of 6 out of 10 for categories like "Innovative Rhymes" and "Vocabulary," the Beasties ended up on the bottom, with 70 out of 100.

Still, he gave them a solid 10 for "Sticking to Themes"—a fact they perversely celebrated in 1998's "Intergalactic," saying: "Got an A from Moe Dee for sticking to themes." Talk about looking on the bright side!



Kool Moe Dee

clean-living fitness regime. According to his brother Frankie Gaye, he often walked along the waterfront, facing the stiff sea wind and announcing he was "breezing the old ways off me." During this year-long European detox, he also started work on his tragically ill-fated comeback album, got interested in Tantric sex, became friendly with Belgium's Prince Charles and found himself wrongly implicated by Interpol in the shooting of a Guyanese drug dealer. Although the matter was cleared up with the Belgian Justice Minister (who provided him with a special hotline in case of future emergencies), he decided enough was enough and left in late 1982. [BLENDER]

YOUR QUESTIONS

Ask Blender, 1040 Sixth Avenue, 22nd floor, New York, NY 10018

E-mail: askblender@blender.com

Please include your first and last name, your hometown and your state or province.



New Stuff



TRICOT PANT, AVAILABLE AT THE PUMA STORE AND SELECT RETAILERS. JOHNNY DAMON NOT INCLUDED.

DID THE HELP OF THERAPISTS, LIGHTSABERS, KARAOKE
MACHINES AND GWYNETH PALTROW MAKE THE THIRD ALBUM FROM
SUPERSTAR CARE BEARS **COLDPLAY** ANY LESS
DIFFICULT TO MAKE? NOT REALLY ...

BACK IN GREY

BY WILLIAM SHAW
PHOTOGRAPHY BY PEROU





Coldplay, left to right:
Jonny Buckland, Guy
Berryman, Chris Martin,
Will Champion.

WEDNESDAY. A PHOTO SHOOT.

Coldplay's lanky singer, Chris Martin, arrives at the East London studio thrilled to discover that the rest of the band—bassist Guy Berryman, drummer Will Champion and guitarist Jonny Buckland—are wearing perfectly matching black trousers and white sneakers. Nobody has asked them to; that's just how they turned out.

This is a good omen. "I think it's very important to come back with a slightly thinner singer and all of us wearing black trousers," Martin announces.

He is certainly thinner. It could be the Ashtanga yoga; it could be the sleepless nights with baby Apple. He denies the latter. "My baby sleeps. She's basically perfect," he grins.

Or it could just be stress. Coldplay have a history of making things difficult for themselves, of last-minute scrapping of tracks, of nail-biting delays. But it has never been as bad as this time. When their third album, *X&Y*, is finally released on June 6, it will be nearly three years since they put out the multimillion-selling *A Rush of Blood to the Head*.

X&Y has been almost 18 months in the making. During the process, they parted from their longtime collaborator Ken Nelson, who produced their first two hit albums, junked almost a year's worth of

recordings and pushed back the release of their album so many times that they were singled out as the main reason an estimated \$615 million was wiped off of the value of British record giant EMI's shares this spring. The company issued a profits warning in February after it became clear that *X&Y* wasn't going to be released in the first quarter.

"That's pretty rock & roll, you know?" says Martin. "I think that's what actual rock & roll must mean. Because we're doing what we believe in and not what's good for the shareholders."

In a week spent in the company of Chris Martin and Coldplay, that's about the only flash of bravado *Blender* sees. For a beloved rock star with a glamorous, Oscar-winning wife and a bouncing newborn, Chris Martin is a mass of jitters. It could just be the familiar Chris Martin cycle of pre-release insecurity. Martin isn't so sure. "I don't remember being insecure

on the last album or the one before," he says wryly, "but everyone assures me that I was."

Either way, after months of prevarication, here they are. In the next few days the album will be officially announced. Martin is antsy with excitement; with his index finger he smears letters on the glass behind which the band are being photographed: "Coldplay #3."



YOU START WITH the best intentions of writing a story that's equally about all four members of Coldplay—because they really are a four-piece band. Inevitably, though, you find yourself drawn mostly to Chris Martin. His charisma doesn't just lie in the beauty of his voice, or of the plangent happy-sad songs he writes, or his long-limbed, long-faced good looks. It's not even his boundless and infectious enthusiasm; being greeted by his wide smile as he leaps to shake your hand is a bit like receiving a welcome from a huge and bumptious Irish Wolfhound. Being with Chris Martin is like watching an unsteady trapeze act. He's a man riddled with paranoid insecurities that threaten to bring him down at any second, yet he's simultaneously the most soaringly self-confident, self-possessed star you could imagine.

Coldplay share a vision; they'd be the first to admit that none of them are great instrumentalists, but they are all committed to making Coldplay this generation's U2, to becoming a classic quartet whose finely honed sound rings and chimes like the most anthemic stadium rock. Often, as drummer Will Champion puts it, it's what they don't play that makes a Coldplay song. "I can't do all that riddly diddly stuff," he explains. "I'm not good enough. It's all about not playing. I think I'm the best non-playing drummer in the world. No one not-plays like me."

But it's clearly Martin's overarching plan, driven by his hyperactive mix of perfectionism and anxiety, that makes the Coldplay machine run. Martin clearly loves the attention, too; recently, though, it hasn't been the sort of attention he likes.

The only dark moment at the photo shoot comes when he spots bassist Guy Berryman leafing through a copy of the British tabloid *The Mirror* that someone has left on the couch. "Don't read that," he insists. "It's evil."

Reluctantly, Berryman folds the paper and puts it down. Last week, *The Mirror* led with a front-page article: "Gwyneth Paltrow and Chris Martin's fairytale marriage is in deep trouble, say friends," it reads. "Rock star Chris, 27, has had problems with his band

"ANYTHING THAT MAKES ME INCREDIBLY HAPPY

ALSO MAKES ME SAD." CHRIS MARTIN



Left: "Don't you know who I am?" "Neigh!" Promoting Make Trade Fair campaign, 2003. Right, with Gwyneth Paltrow and Apple.

Coldplay's overdue third album—while Oscar-winning Gwyneth has been left home alone with their eight-month-old daughter Apple."

When Coldplay released their last album, Chris Martin was just another handsome rock star. His marriage to Paltrow and the birth of their daughter changed that. Now Martin is more famous than the band he's in.

The worst thing is that people close to him start to believe the fictions. His father rings him up, concerned about what he's read in the papers.

"Dad!" Chris explodes. "Why didn't you just ask me?" Invariably, says Martin, the story is pure "bollocks."

Martin is the product of that peculiar British institution, the boarding school; Sherborne School is an ancient Gothic pile built of honey-colored stone. It's an old-fashioned English world in which boys learn rugby and cricket. In chapel they pass the names of old boys—carved in stone—who died defending Britain's empire. It was a place where Chris Martin prospered; at night he would sneak out of the dormitory and break into the music school to practice.

But his schoolboy self is shocked at a world in which people don't play by rules he recognizes. He'll offer a paparazzo a photo on condition they stop bugging him and Gwyneth; they take it and five minutes later they're still following him. "Knobs," he says. "This is a thing I've never encountered before in my life. And there is nothing I can do about it. I can't hit a photographer. I just can't. And," he adds emphatically, "I never have." (Last year, Martin was accused of kicking a photographer who had tried to take shots of him with Paltrow; the year before, he was charged with causing malicious damage by smashing an Australian photographer's windshield. The charges were dropped.)

Martin blames this phenomenon on the fact that a) the real news is so sad you can't be expected to think about it during your coffee break, and b) we don't live in villages anymore, so we can't gossip about the butcher's wife.

So you have become the global village's butcher's wife?

"Well, the butcher's husband," he grins.

TODAY IS THE butcher's husband's birthday; Chris Martin is 28.

Paltrow is in the States, working. Martin gathers many of his oldest friends around him. His friend Simon Pegg comes; in Britain, Pegg is a well-known actor and comic—Martin and guitarist Jonny Buckland cameo-ed in Pegg's 2004

movie, *Shaun of the Dead*. Pegg is a *Star Wars* fanatic. The two like to battle with lightsabers.

"Sometimes," says Martin, "it's good not to overthink. Sometimes it's good to have swordfights with Britain's leading comedian." As a gift tonight, he gives Pegg a Darth Vader helmet.

During the evening, his friend Danny McNamara from the band Embrace calls to wish him a happy birthday. Last year Martin gave McNamara a song he'd written, "Gravity"; it became a Top Ten hit in the U.K. for the band. McNamara is onstage in Cambridge singing the song when he makes the call. Three thousand people in a concert hall sing Martin's "Happy Birthday" on his cellphone.

His old friend James is at the celebration too; he's known Martin since he was 7. Martin is happy to be with James again, but he's also feeling sad because he knows that the band are about to start touring and he won't see him again for ages.

This is typical. Chris Martin lives at the extremes of mood. Cockiness and self-doubt. Happiness and anxiety. Emotion X and emotion Y. "It's something to do with the tension of opposites," he tries to explain. "Anything that makes me incredibly happy also makes me sad."

THURSDAY, EARLY IN the morning Martin wakes. He's thinking. He reaches for the cellphone and writes a text-message memo to himself. He'll pick it up later in the day.

In the last three months of making an album, he doesn't sleep much anyway. For him the night is a huge other world when he can lie awake and think. He closes his eyes and sees lists. *I need to take the lyrics from that verse and move them ... Jonny needs to wear these trousers ...*

Martin writes lists obsessively. He scribbles ideas on the back of his hand, on scraps of paper, on his piano, on his computer. The other day he had to take his computer back to the store; the staff looked at him strangely. His computer was covered in writing.

For months he's been writing track listings for the new CD, rearranging the order, eliminating one track, reinstating another. He grades the songs on a scale of one to 10. For a while, a seven-out-of-10 may be on the list, but eventually it'll be elbowed aside by another song.

The X&Y sessions began their prolonged life in Chicago in late 2003; Jonny Buckland and Martin retreated there after the last world tour to write. Martin knew he was about to become a father and that the birth of a daughter would be a distraction. He wanted to get a head start.



ARE YOU THE NICEST GUY IN ROCK?

TAKE OUR QUIZ AND FIND OUT IF YOU'RE EVEN FIT TO CARRY CHRIS MARTIN'S OXFAM TOTE BAG ...

- 1 YOU COME ACROSS A BABY SEAL WHO HAS HURT ITS FLIPPER. DO YOU ...
 - a) Conduct emergency surgery and then let it suckle at your teat, the poor thing.
 - b) Walk on by. Hey, you're not a qualified "veterinarian."
 - c) Club it to death—just as you did its parents.
- 2 HOW DO YOU GREET THE NEWS THAT YOUR MOVIE STAR PARTNER IS PREGNANT?
 - a) With unadulterated joy.
 - b) With a defeated shrug.
 - c) With a writ from your lawyer demanding the baby be DNA-tested before the bitch gets a penny of your money.
- 3 YOU WRITE A GUARANTEED HIT SONG. WHAT DO YOU DO WITH IT?
 - a) Generously give it to a friend to record.
 - b) Record it with your own band.
 - c) Record it as your first solo single after spraypainting SEE YA, SUCKAS! on the side of your band's tour bus.
- 4 WHAT IS THE "MAKE TRADE FAIR" CAMPAIGN?
 - a) A movement you support to convince the governments of developed nations that they should deal more equitably with poorer countries.
 - b) Something to do with foreigners.
 - c) That time you paid those underage Romanian hookers in coke.
- 5 YOU DEVELOP A SLIGHT SORE THROAT ON THE EVE OF A SHOW FOR TERMINALLY ILL FANS. WHAT DO YOU DO?
 - a) Play it. It's for the kids!
 - b) Postpone it, regretfully.
 - c) Cancel it and party with underage Romanian hookers. Whom you pay in coke.

IF YOU ANSWERED...

MOSTLY A: Congratulations! You are the nicest guy in rock!

MOSTLY B: You think you're nice, but you're not. In fact, it's people like you that let Hitler happen.

MOSTLY C: You are Hitler. CLARK COLLIS

HI, I'M ROLAN BOLAN. HICK ME.

By christening his daughter Apple, Chris Martin is only the latest in a long line of rock stars to saddle his spawn with a needlessly cruel—sorry, *lovably eccentric*—name.

FLORA/FAUNA

APPLE (CHRIS MARTIN),
BAMBOO (BIG BOI),
DANDELION (KEITH RICHARDS),
FUCHSIA (STING)



HIPPY-DIPPY

BLUE ANGEL (THE EDGE), DUSTY RAIN
(VANILLA ICE), KARMA (LUDACRIS)

GET IT?

ROLAN (MARC BOLAN), ZOWIE (DAVID
BOWIE), JERMAJESTY (JERMAINE JACKSON)

EXTREME IDOLATRY

LENNON (LIAM GALLAGHER), DEVO (MAY-
NARD JAMES KEENAN), HENDRIX HALEN
(ZAKK WYLDE), WOLFGANG (EDDIE VAN
HALEN), JESSE JAMES (JON BON JOVI),
ELGIN BAYLOR (GINUWINE), PRINCE MICHAEL
(MICHAEL JACKSON)

EVERYDAY WORDS THAT HAPPEN TO NOT BE NAMES

ISLAND (GREGG ALLMAN),
DENIM (TONI BRAXTON),
PIRATE (JONATHAN DAVIS)



SCI-FI

MOON UNIT (FRANK ZAPPA), SEVEN SIRIUS
(ERYKAH BADU), REBOP (TODD RUNDGREN)

COMIC BOOK GEEKERY

DRAVEN (CHESTER BENNINGTON)

NON SEQUITUR HALL OF FAME

SPECK WILDHORSE (JOHN MELLENCAMP)
HEAVENLY HIRAANI TIGER LILY (MICHAEL
HUTCHENCE)



Hey, why the
long face?

COLDPLAY

"And then my daughter was born," says Martin. "I was still working, but I was distracted ..."

Naturally.

"... And happily so."

The band worked on the songs in London, Liverpool and New York. But by summer they were floundering. "It became a day job," says Champion. "We would come in at 10 and go home at seven. It was good for our social lives but it wasn't particularly fruitful."

As ever, Martin's perfectionism seeped through to the other members as paranoia. Was any of this any good? Is it all shit? "Are we objective enough to know what is shit and what isn't?" Buckland mulls. "Well, I'm not objective enough to tell you whether I'm objective enough to tell you."

With the album's original release date just a few months away, the band regrouped, junked most of the tracks and started again.

Was it luxurious, not being a pop star for 16 months?

"No," Martin says, smiling at his own contrariness over a breakfast of sausage and beans. "It felt quite depressing. I was enjoying being a pop star."

You enjoy having the sheet of paper under the hotel room door telling you what you're going to be doing for the day?

"Yeah, I really do."

When he came off a long world tour in 2003, Martin spent a little time visiting a therapist to help him come back down to earth. He says it's like doing an interview, except you can let out all the fucked-up stuff. It means, he says, that you don't moan so much to your friends.

In the summer, with the recording process at a low ebb, Martin found he was missing performing so much that he started renting karaoke machines at \$450 a go. He's had a long love affair with karaoke. As a 19-year-old student at University College London, he'd fulfilled his longtime ambition by forming a band, but he was unnerved by becoming a frontman. On holiday in Tunisia with a school friend named Phil Harvey—who was later to become Coldplay's manager—Martin entered a karaoke competition on each night of the vacation. And every night he won the bottle of champagne (useless to him, as he doesn't drink). He returned to the U.K. buoyed, ready to come to grips with his new role.

After a year of not playing live, Martin turned to karaoke again to remind himself what it's like to be a singer. "'Cause I was missing that thing," he says. "I'm the worst karaoke singer of all time—which is why we write our own music."

Which songs do you sing?

"Often I try Otis Redding. It's a great

chance when you've got a private karaoke machine to try and sing like a black guy, you know? Because if you try it on record—"

But you did try it on record. You and Bono did Marvin Gaye's "What's Going On" for the charity Artists Against AIDS Worldwide.

"We did." Pause. "I think you'll find the term is *butchered*."

In August, perhaps anxious that his position as first among equals was creating divisions within Coldplay, Martin poured out his frustrations to the band in a bar. He bitched about how he hated his new life as an A-list celeb and the lies that were written about him.

"When Apple was born, there was a time when I felt very resentful of the rest of the band," he admits. "I felt that they didn't understand—not because there is anything to understand. But the thing about babies is, you can only understand if you have one."

His mates sympathized. Gradually the tracks started to come together, but still frustratingly slowly. The 2004 deadline had already passed; they set another for the spring of this year. By Christmas they thought they'd finished, but then—typically—Martin had another crisis of confidence. He played the album to what he describes as "a couple of friends."

Was one of them Gwyneth?

He smiles and, ducking the question, says that one of them was Danny McNamara. He's like that about Paltrow: He tries his hardest not to mention her name in interviews. The less he can have their names linked in the press, the better. He manages to sidestep a question about whether the love song "Moses"—an unrecorded live track—or the magnificently soppy "What If" were inspired by Gwyneth by abruptly changing the subject to the sausage and beans on the plate before him.

Anyway, it's McNamara, rather than Paltrow, whom he blames for the next crisis of confidence. The Embrace singer told him, "Sounds like there's a song missing."

"No there isn't, you bastard," replied Martin.

But the moment it was said, Martin started thinking Danny was right. By then he was so close to it that there could be 10 songs missing, for all he knew. It was a terrifying feeling.

He mulled it over in his waking night hours, the way he does. *Look, you haven't got anything simple and chord-y that you just want to sing along to.*

Right, you bastard, he told the voice in his head. He got out of bed, picked up his guitar and at 3 A.M. wrote a song called "A Message."

"And it was amazing," he says.

For someone with buckets of self-confidence, you can be easily destroyed.

"Yeah. I can be destroyed by anything."



FRIDAY. IN THE afternoon, Coldplay play an impromptu secret gig in front of about 40 friends at their loft rehearsal space. Martin has described it to *Blender* as an attempt to make themselves nervous by playing unheard material in front of a small audience. If that's the case, it works.

Martin's father, in crisp blue blazer, stands strait-laced among the tiny crowd. His dad taught him a crucial lesson that early on separated Coldplay from the rest of Britain's often bitchy music scene: "He always says you won't get anywhere by slagging other people off." Chris is unashamedly rock's Mr. Nice Guy.

Martin starts by thanking everyone for coming. Including his dad: "Thank you for getting it on with my mum."

Then he launches into "Square One." It's a magnificent, sprawling song—in three parts—about Martin's fear of returning to Square One, and the crucial importance of making sure that never happens.

The band is full of energy. Martin crouches at the piano, intense, bent almost double, in a pose oddly reminiscent of brooding pianist Schroeder from the *Peanuts* cartoons. But as they continue through the set, the vitality evaporates; despite having set himself the challenge of playing this impromptu small gig, he's disappointed the crowd doesn't seem more into it. Rather than see that it's hard for a sparse 40 people to wig out in the middle of a London afternoon, it's as if he's starting to wonder again about whether any of it is good enough.

Martin believes anyone making an album should read Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*. It is, after all, the story of how a man took 85 days to catch a single fish. "It's about someone struggling for ages to capture this amazing thing," says Martin. "And when he catches the marlin and gets it back to the shore, people pull it apart."

Right now he's reading *Into the Heart—The Stories Behind Every U2 Song*. U2—who were one of the blueprints for Coldplay—are on their 11th album; Coldplay are still beginners.

"But U2 can be beaten!" declares Martin bullishly. "For me it's no different from

Chris Martin regrets asking if anyone needs a lift home.



the film *Rocky*. You study your opponent. And I regard them as opponents."

They'd be flattered.

"They should be terrified," retorts Martin with a half-smile. But he means it. If you don't aim to take on the best, he'll say, what's the point? "Why settle for being the ninth-best band ever?"

So where do you rank yourself now?

"Ever? Um, I think we're probably fourth." Pause. "Only joking."



ONE WEEK LATER. Backstage at the Universal Amphitheater in Los Angeles. Coldplay is here to play their first large-scale show in 18 months, as a benefit for public radio station KCRW.

Martin has not put in an appearance

album. The band has agreed to record a live segment to plug the show.

The concept for the segment is that the band will be playing acoustically in a hotel room. Gamely they set up and launch into an acoustic version of what they've finally decided is X&Y's lead single, "Speed of Sound," with Champion on bongos, Berryman and Buckland on acoustic guitars, and Martin on percussion.

Instantly, it's beautiful. Martin's crackling, infected throat has a fragile, reaching beauty to it. The strange, unfathomable song bursts into life. Watching the monitor, the MTV producer's face lights up. The crew is buzzing. The band are weary, but grinning too.

Everyone's happy—except for Coldplay's manager, Estelle. She has just calcu-

"HNOBS," MARTIN SAYS OF THE

PAPARAZZI.

"THIS IS A THING I'VE NEVER ENCOUNTERED BEFORE IN MY LIFE."

yet; he's been staying with Paltrow in Santa Monica. When he arrives, he looks tired. He's got a sore throat.

By the time he bounds onstage for the soundcheck, the rest of the band have already been playing for half an hour. "You don't have any singing on backing tracks, do you?" he asks the soundman. It's only half in jest.

The middle of the day is taken up filming a segment for MTV. They get in a van to take them to the Universal Sheraton, a few hundred yards away. MTV has chosen Coldplay to launch a new show called *MTV 5 Star*, in which MTV gets to premiere an

lated that this clip of them playing their next single will air days before the single goes to radio—thus giving MTV an exclusive that is owed to America's radio stations. This will mean trouble.

There isn't time to record another song, and nobody wants to. This performance is too perfect to lose. Estelle is on the phone, desperately trying to OK the clip with EMI.

Martin is suddenly bullish. "Whose fucking band is it?" he demands. "It's ours. EMI don't own us." Pause. "Well ... They own 75% of us ... but ..."

And everybody's laughing. [BLENDER]

FIRST ROUND



SHYNE

Puffy's patsy, currently in jail for assault, reckless endangerment and gun possession.



G.G. ALLIN

Deceased punker arrested over 50 times for attacking, and urinating on, his audience.



LISA "LEFT EYE" LOPES

Late TLC singer; set boyfriend Andre Rison's sneakers alight ... and burned down his house.



IKE TURNER

Pop music's resident reminder that a wifebeater isn't just a tank top.



JERRY LEE LEWIS

Possibly threatened to kill Paul Anka. Definitely shot own bassist with a .357 Magnum.



C-MURDER

In jail for murder—after 2003 shooting of a 16-year-old in a Louisiana nightclub.



ALEX LIFESON

Rush guitarist; subdued with a stun gun during a brawl last year with Florida cops.



DMX

Drove his SUV through a gate at JFK airport last year, then identified himself as a Fed.



MARK WAHLBERG

Did 45 days in the clink at age 17 after a PCP-fueled assault binge. And those abs ...



JOHNNY PAYCHECK

The late "Take This Job and Shove It" honky-tonker shot a man during a 1985 bar fight.



TED NUGENT

Rock's preeminent big-game hunter and NRA advocate—and author of *Kill It & Grill It*.



VIOLENT J

The Insane Clown Posse MC used his smackdown skills on a St. Louis DJ in 2001.



BUSHWICK BILL

3'8" Geto Boy; threatened to throw his girlfriend's baby out a window unless she shot him.



KID ROCK

This February, the hard-living Detroit hip-hopper punched the DJ in a Nashville strip club.



JOHNNY CASH

Popped pills, favored black clothing, jailed for vagrancy, had a fight with an ostrich.



MARILYN MANSON

Assaulted a burly security guard at a concert in Michigan. With his scrotum.

SECOND ROUND



G.G. ALLIN

Shyne's gangsta shtick is no match for Allin, who often performed nude and covered in his own feces.



LEFT EYE LOPES

Left Eye also trashed Rison's cars: Slap-happy Ike finally gets his comeuppance at the hands of a woman scorned.



JERRY LEE LEWIS

Stabbed the editor of *Country Music* magazine in the neck with a broken bottle; showed up at Graceland to "kill Elvis."



DMX

Cited for animal cruelty after 13 pit bulls—as well as a gun and crack pipes—were found at his New Jersey home.



JOHNNY PAYCHECK

Was never in *Funky Bunch* or *Planet of the Apes*.



TED NUGENT

Claims to have tanked his Vietnam physical by going to the bathroom in his pants for an entire week prior ... and not changing.



BUSHWICK BILL

With his eye shot out, Bill put a grisly ER photo of the aftermath on the cover of the Geto Boys' next album.



MARILYN MANSON

A boy named Marilyn wins—Cash's "vagrancy" consisted of picking flowers. And the ostrich broke his ribs.

QUARTERFINALS



G.G. ALLIN

Beat himself bloody with cans and bottles during his shows, which rarely lasted more than 15 minutes before being shut down. He also downed laxatives before performing to facilitate the self-soiling process.



JERRY LEE LEWIS

Allin OD'd before he could fulfill his career-long promise to off himself onstage. Meanwhile, Lewis still tours regularly at nearly 70.



TED NUGENT

Nearly severed his own leg with a chainsaw last year while filming a VH1 series.



BUSHWICK BILL

Believed to be the only rapper to glorify necrophilia in his lyrics.

ROCK & ROLL

INFAMOUS! INDESTRUCTIBLE!
INCARCERATED! THE
MEANEST HARD-CASES IN
MUSIC FACE OFF IN
BLENDER'S FIRST-EVER
ULTIMATE-FIGHTING
CHAMPIONSHIP

BY STEVE KANDELL

SEMIFINALS



JERRY LEE LEWIS

Was a bigamist. Twice. Two of his ex-wives were found dead under what could be described as "unusual circumstances," although Jerry Lee was never charged with anything.



BUSHWICK BILL

A devious little bastard, he claimed the ill-fated plot to have his girlfriend kill him was in fact an attempt to scam life insurance money for his mother.

FINALS



JERRY LEE LEWIS

Smashed a microphone stand into a fan's face at a concert in 1968. Also, Bushwick loses points for being a Swatch Watch breakdancer back in the '80s.



CELEBRITY FIGHT CLUB!

ANIMALS!

FINALS

SEMIFINALS

QUARTERFINALS

SECOND ROUND

FIRST ROUND



COURTNEY LOVE

50 claims he's crazy ... but when Courtney found a woman sleeping in her ex-boyfriend's house, she allegedly doused her with scotch and threw a lit candle at her, then pinned her down and pinched her breast.



SUGE KNIGHT

Made Dean's List at UNLV.



COURTNEY LOVE

Courtney has a lot to learn from Diana Ross about sustaining a career as a diva. But Diana has a lot to learn from Courtney about physically assaulting people.



50 CENT

50: Nine.
Game: Five.



VARG VIKERNES

While Lurch was a one-time offender, Varg hung with a particularly tough crowd—bandmates reputedly fried their former singer's brain and ate it and made jewelry out of his skull fragments.



SUGE KNIGHT

Still believed by many to have ordered the hit on Tupac Shakur.



DIANA ROSS

Even Diana's done more jail time than paper gangsta Puffy.



COURTNEY LOVE

Love once deemed White "worthy of my pussy," which, while intended as compliment, still makes him sound like her prison bitch.



50 CENT

Rendered rail-thin and, eventually, dead from heroin, Sid can't hold his own against 50, who served hard time in 1994 for selling crack.



THE GAME

Poor Janis: too drunk to handle a hardened gangbanger.



VARG VIKERNES

Handily wins Nordic grudge match; when arrested, Varg had 300 pounds of dynamite—to blow up a church.



BIG LURCH

Cops found him standing naked in the street, covered in blood, with chunks of his victim's flesh in his stomach.



JAMES BROWN

Richards's inability to die continues to impress, but JB led cops on a high-speed interstate car chase.



SUGE KNIGHT

Gang connections, brushes with the law—and reportedly dangled Vanilla Ice by his legs from a hotel balcony.



P. DIDDY

Gatsby wannabe; bludgeoned producer Steve Stoute with a champagne bottle and phone.



DIANA ROSS

"The Boss" attacked a Heathrow security guard who allegedly groped her breast.



JACK WHITE

Punched Jason Stollsteimer of the Von Bondies to the floor of a Detroit club in 2003.



COURTNEY LOVE

Where to begin? Attacks on stewardesses and reporters, breaking and entering ...



50 CENT

Hey, did you know he was shot nine times? You heard it here first!



SID VICIOUS

Talent-free Sex Pistols bassist; stabbed girlfriend Nancy to death in 1979.



JANIS JOPLIN

"Fucks like a truck and practically busted my rib cage," said one of her many paramours.



THE GAME

Shot five times and left for dead in 2001 during a home invasion.



BJÖRK

Threw reporter to the floor of Bangkok Airport in 1996 for saying "Welcome to Thailand."



VARG VIKERNES

Singer of Nordic black-metal band Burzum stabbed former bandmate to death in 1993.



BIG LURCH

Undistinguished Texas MC; in 2001, tore open the chest of a woman and ate her lungs.



VINCE NEIL

Long history of assault and battery; did time for vehicular manslaughter in 1984.



KEITH RICHARDS

More into self-abuse than the regular kind during his 73 years in the Stones.



JAMES BROWN

The Hardest Working Man in Show Business—from armed robbery to domestic violence.



SUGE KNIGHT

Reputedly founded Death Row with a loan from a cocaine dealer; jailed for assault.



INGER LORRE

Nymphs singer; protested treatment of band by urinating on the desk of A&R exec.

THE GOOD GIRL

Likes the Dual Screen action. Top or bottom, she's always in control

Likes the soft, sensitive feeling of Touch-Screen technology

Likes how the DS Voice-Recognition responds to her sweet voice

Likes how she can play with her sorority sisters all night long...using Nintendo DS wirelessly

Likes to dot her "I's" with hearts using the stylus in PictoChat

LIKES TO
PLAY NICE



THE BAD GIRL

Likes the Dual Screen action because two is always better than one

Likes to touch as hard or as fast as she wants

Likes how the Voice-Recognition does her bidding and never ever talks back

Likes how with wireless gaming, she can kick the living crap out of 16 total strangers

Likes to send her little secrets using PictoChat

LIKES TO
PLAY AROUND

NINTENDO  DS™

touching is good.

MISS THING

BOASTING A SMASH SINGLE, A HIT ALBUM AND THE FINEST LEGS IN POP, **AMERIE** IS R&B'S IT GIRL. WHAT'S MORE, SHE'S LETHAL WITH AN ASSAULT RIFLE ...

BY JONAH WEINER
PHOTOGRAPHY BY JUDSON BAKER

AMERIE IS IN a bad part of D.C., trying to find a gay bar. Squeezed into the backseat of her Range Rover, the 25-year-old R&B singer squints out at the darkening road through an oversized pair of Chanel sunglasses, calling out directions to her manager. Run-down buildings with boarded-up windows line the streets, and men cluster together on the corners despite a slight drizzle. "I used to live not too far from here," she says. "I got tired of Georgetown—you don't get the flavor of the city over there."

With just a month before her second album, *Touch*, hits stores, Amerie has come back to her college town, Washington, D.C., for a warmup show at one of the city's premier "alternative" nightclubs. Her hit single, "1 Thing"—a storm of fluttering vocals, guitar stabs and percolating percussion that has just cracked the R&B Top 10—ensures she won't be playing venues this small for long, but tonight, she's relishing the opportunity: "The gay community shows me love," she says as we pull into the parking lot of The Edge, an hour late for sound

adds, "People think I'm just this good girl, but there are other sides they don't see."

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

DEEP DOWN, AMERIE is a goody-goody. When she wants to underscore a point, she sounds more like Ned Flanders than an R&B temptress. Bounding into her hotel lobby later on, she wears bright green moccasins with little fur pom-poms that bounce animatedly along with her every step. "I like wearing fun things," she chirps. "They make me pretty *doggone* happy."

On her 2002 debut, *All I Have*, she made like Mary J. Blige's charmed kid sister: Her sunny single, "Why Don't We Fall in Love," was a schoolgirl crush set to an upbeat soul sample. The album, shimmering with innocent desire, sold modestly.

On *Touch*, though, Amerie pushes her image into edgier territory.

duces Amerie as a girl unafraid to wiggle it. "To me, this beat represented her growth," Harrison says. "You gotta show some skin, you gotta shake your ass to it and your vocal has to be perfect to compete with the aggressiveness of the drums." It's a post-Beyoncé move that seems necessary these days to make a dent on the pop landscape. "You have to give people more than a great song," Harrison adds. "You have to give another facet of yourself—and showing skin doesn't hurt."

Indeed, the similarities between "Crazy in Love" and "1 Thing" are pronounced—thematically, sonically and bootyliciously.

Have you decided to model yourself after a certain Ms. Knowles?

"No!" Amerie protests, pressing a palm to her chest, adding, "I'm Amerie. There can only be one Amerie, and I'm the best at being me."

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

AMERIE ROGERS IS an army brat. The daughter of a chief warrant officer named Charles and an artist named Si Yuk, she was born in Massachusetts on January 12, 1980. A few months later, the family moved to her mother's native Korea, where Amerie lived for three years. From there, she and her younger sister Angela were hustled around the globe to homes in Texas, Alaska, Virginia and Germany. She says the experience brought her closer to her family, but made significant connections with other people difficult.

"She was a bookworm," Angela, 24, recalls. "I would be like, 'Let's go out and play,' but she'd always have her head stuck in a Brothers Grimm book."

"I was such a dork," Amerie concurs. "Roald Dahl, C.S. Lewis—I've always →

"I'M EXPLORING MY **SENSUAL, MORE SEXUAL** SIDE."

check. "The last time I played here, all the guys threw dollars onto the stage. Tonight, there'll be male models behind me."

Inside the club, no models have arrived yet, denying *Blender* the sight of a room full of well-oiled pecs and leopard-print G-strings. Instead, we are free to focus on Amerie: Practicing "1 Thing" in a tight-clinging sweat suit while grinding her five-foot-five frame against an imaginary pole, she sings about the "one thing" a lover does to drive her wild.

"It could be bringing flowers, or something more ... physical," she explains later. Dropping to a silky, conspiratorial tone, she

"I'm exploring my sensual, more sexual side," she announces.

"Amerie is a very sweet girl, but she is also very sexy," says Lisa Ellis, executive vice president of Sony Urban Music. "When she was younger, we wanted to keep the sexiness undertoned. Now, she is allowing herself to show the woman in her."

"1 Thing," which Amerie wrote with Rich Harrison, the producer behind Beyoncé's "Crazy in Love" and Jennifer Lopez's "Get Right," started climbing the pop charts in February, when it was released as the first single from the *Hitch* soundtrack. The song is a dance-floor monster that re-intro-

Amerie's co-workers
had an inexplicable
urge to stay hydrated.



loved fantasy and imagination."

Amerie describes her parents as conservative, protective, traditional Christians. Growing up, she and her sister were forbidden to leave the house or use the phone on schooldays.

"I was the one who snuck out with boys, the one who smoked," her sister says. "Amerie never did any of that."

In 1996, Amerie enrolled at Georgetown University to study literature—in between bouts of Hemingway, she learned how to mow down enemies with an M-16 and storm beaches in hostile territory. "I was in the Navy ROTC. My dad didn't force me into it or anything. I joined so I could afford an education."

It was during a three-day training mission in Virginia Beach that Amerie decided she wasn't cut out for military life. "I was the only one who had Estée Lauder cold cream in my pitch tent. Being on a boat, with all the sun bouncing off the water, do you know how many wrinkles you can get?"

Amerie quit ROTC after sophomore year and pursued another, less dermatologically hazardous passion. On weekends she went to New York City, where she wrote songs and worked with different producers, trying to realize the dream of pop stardom she'd been harboring ever since she choreographed a dance routine to Madonna's "Lucky Star" as a 5-year-old.

Her big break came second semester of senior year in a McDonald's parking lot, where she met Rich Harrison. Harrison was then an unknown beatmaker with a Mary J. Blige album track on his C.V. "I'd



never heard of him," Amerie says. "That's why we met in a public place. For all I knew, he was just trying to pick up chicks."

"She sang a couple of bars for me right there," Harrison recalls. "I was really happy with the raspy quality of her voice—it was exactly what I'd been looking for."

The pair clicked and put a demo together, and Amerie was signed to Columbia Records by the summer. "Thank God it worked out," she says, glowing. "Because I didn't make a résumé. I didn't go to any job fairs. I just wanted to make music."

AFTER SOUND CHECK, we drive past a sodden grass field near the slate-gray Potomac—Amerie's former ROTC drill site. "They had me out there every day at 5 A.M.," she says. "I could do 200 push-

ups back then. Now, I can do eight."

Her pushups might not be what they once were, but Amerie isn't slacking. Consider her itinerary for the next 24 hours: From 8:30 P.M. to midnight, she will keep her mouth closed, except to drink warm ginger-root tea, giving her vocal cords a rest. At 2 A.M., she will sing to a packed room of Washington, D.C.'s gayest. At 3 A.M. she will drive up to New York City's JFK airport and catch an early-morning flight out to Los Angeles, where she will spend a week running from promotional performances to photo shoots to interviews, fly to San Francisco to do the same thing, then New Orleans, then Europe, then Japan. There is no drill instructor at diva boot camp, but it can be pretty demanding.

Not that it's without rewards. "When I was on Rodeo Drive, doing a film," Amerie says later on, "I was spending around \$16,000 a month on clothes and shoes. But that's not that bad, right?"

The film in question was *First Daughter*, a 2004 Katie Holmes vehicle in which Amerie played a supporting role. She says she dreams of starring in an action movie ("I'd love to play Angelina Jolie's arch-nemesis in *Tomb Raider 3*"), but her real extracurricular obsession involves elves, faeries and codpieces. When she's not playing 12-hour *Sims* marathons at her house in Edgewater, New Jersey—the tony suburb that is also home to Tyson Beckford and Q-Tip—she's working on writing her own *Lord of the Rings*-style series.

"I love fantasy," she says. "I told you, I'm a dork." [BLENDER]

BEAT OUT

HOW A 10-SECOND FUNK BREAK BECAME AMERIE'S HIT "1 THING"—STEP BY STEP

INSTANT HISTORY!



1 New Orleans funk group **THE METERS** release "Oh, Calcutta!" on 1970's *Look-ka Py Py*. At the 1:40 mark, drummer Ziggy Modeliste and guitarist Leo Nocentelli play a 10-second, back-and-forth breakdown.

2 Washington, D.C.-based producer **RICH HARRISON** hears the track for the first time in May of 2004. "I love the Meters; New Orleans music is very close to D.C. Go-Go, very percussive and chant-oriented. And Ziggy, he's crazy."

3 Harrison takes the break beat and gets to work. "I started processing the way it could be flipped. I added bongo, cowbell, a ride cymbal and sent it off to **AMERIE**."



4 The duo writes and finishes the song, dubbed "**1 THING**," in less time than it takes to watch *The Two Towers*. "We nailed it in two, three hours," says Harrison.

5 **COLUMBIA RECORDS**, however, is not impressed. "We felt the choruses needed to be bigger and that there were things that needed to be added," says Sony Music's Lisa Ellis. Harrison and Amerie go back and work on it.

6 "We kept bringing it back to them, and the label kept saying it sounded unfinished," recalls Amerie. "People just weren't getting it, so we decided to **LEAK IT OURSELVES**."

7 The song takes off on the radio and is added at the last minute to the **HITCH SOUNDTRACK**. Nine weeks later, it vaults into the Top 20.



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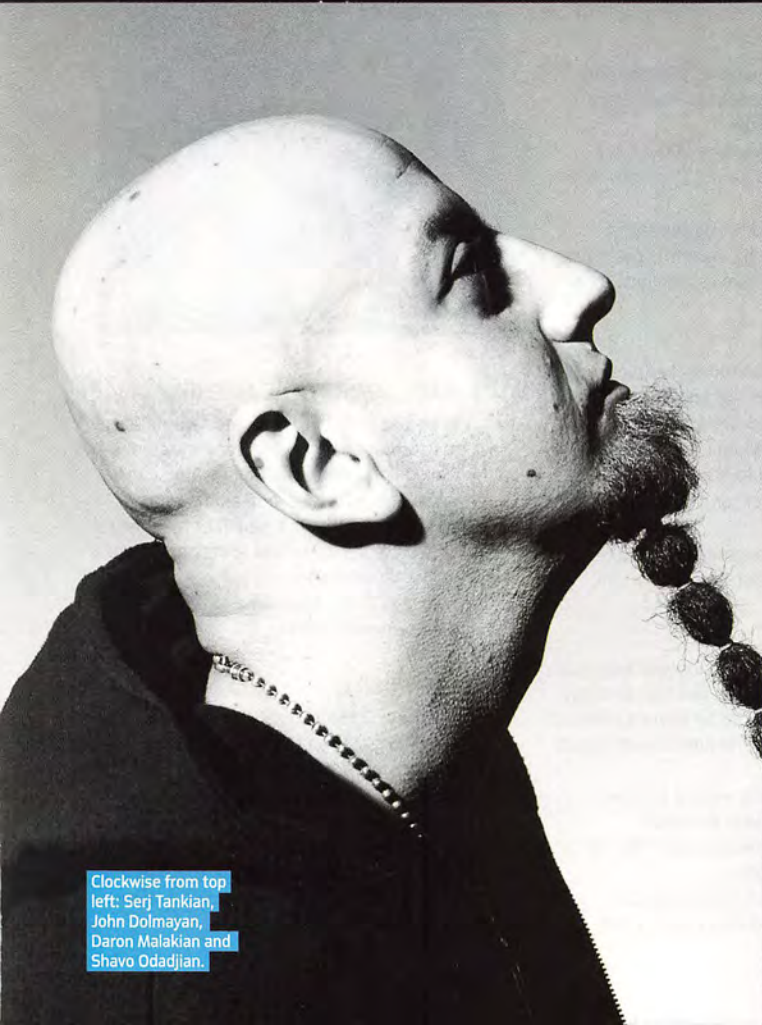
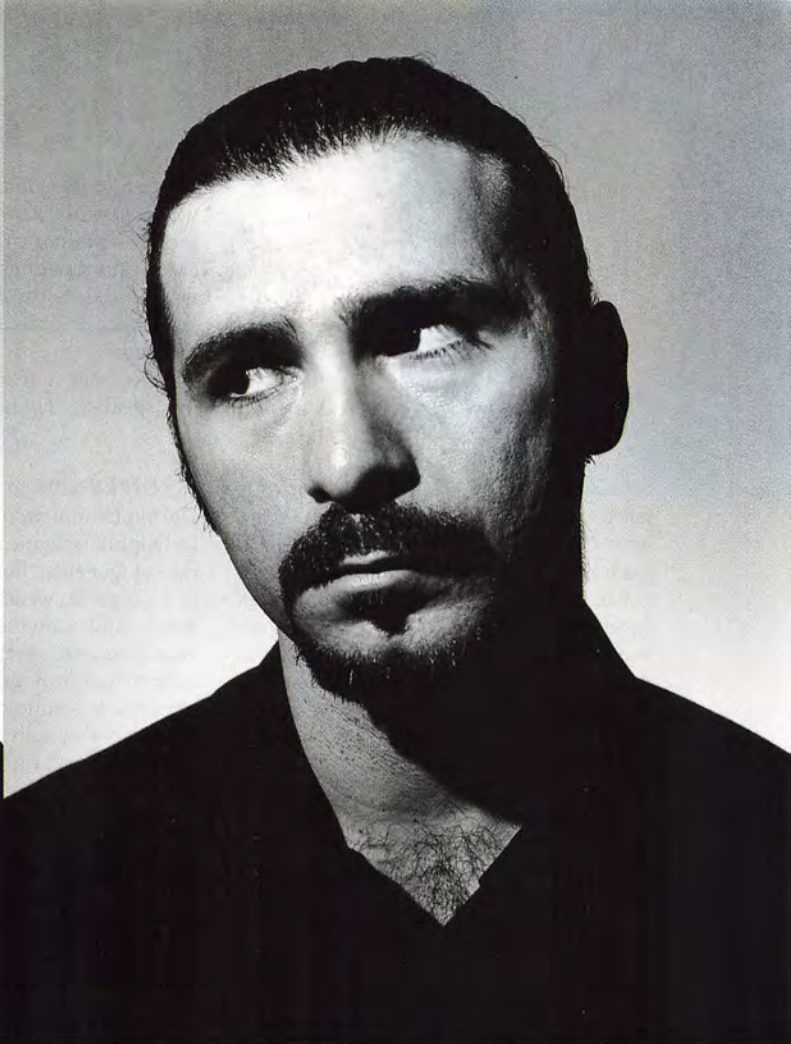
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ARMENIAN RHAPSODY

PLATINUM-SELLING METALLERS **SYSTEM OF A DOWN**

KNOW ALL ABOUT POLITICS, WAR ZONES, AVANT-GARDE
JAZZ AND FOREIGN SWEAR WORDS. WHAT THE QUARTET
CAN'T UNDERSTAND IS HOW THEY GOT SO DAMN POPULAR.

BY CHRIS NORRIS
PHOTOGRAPHY BY JUSTIN STEPHENS



Clockwise from top
left: Serj Tankian,
John Dolmayan,
Daron Malakian and
Shavo Odadjian.

ON'T

let anyone tell you *Blender* doesn't travel to the front lines. Today, we are embedded journalists, deep in the trenches—actors in a music video. Attired in a black jumpsuit, black boots and a visored combat helmet, we are standing on a bridge in downtown Los Angeles, part of a platoon of crypto-fascist stormtroopers who will march menacingly behind System of a Down as they play their furious new single, "B.Y.O.B."

We jackbooted goons are meant to symbolize mindless conformity or state-sanctioned terror or something. "It has to do with scale and people and power and other political ideas," says director Jake Nava, citing touchstones like Stalinist propaganda art and Nazi filmmaker Leni Riefenstahl (influences less discernible in his recent opus, Beyoncé's "Crazy in Love"). Some visors are emblazoned with words like CASH, HATE and BUY. Ours, for reasons beyond our understanding, says GOD.

On the bridge, System of a Down's four members assemble around a drum kit and amps. Drummer John Dolmayan stands behind the floor tom, singer Serj Tankian beside him, holding a cup of coffee. Guitarist-singer Daron Malakian is next in a black leather sports jacket, leather pants and sneakers, and bassist Shavo Odadjian crouches to his left, braided chinbeard swinging to and fro. "What are you?" he asks us when we meet him, dressed in our jumpsuit. "A goon," we answer. "I know. But what are you *playing*?" Oh, that Shavo.

As we line up on the bridge, a voice crackles on the loudspeaker, "OK! When you hear the music, begin your march." Then, after four beeps, the buzzsaw intro to "B.Y.O.B." kicks in and we start our parade. Marching to thrash requires a speedy gait recalling one of Monty Python's Silly Walks. "Cut!" We reassemble to try another marching style. "OK!" The music starts again and off we go—"Hut! Hut! Hut!"—to the neo-metal madness.

As we come marching up alongside Malakian, he leans to the mic and screams, "Why do we always send the poor?", unleashing a fresh onslaught that castigates our president, denounces the military-industrial complex and imagines a crowd of revelers partying in the desert, blowing up the sunshine. This is the lead single from

the first of two albums SOAD is releasing this year—*Mezmerize* now, *Hypnotize* in the fall—two stormy, baroque works of rage and avant-weirdness that touch on love, war, mind control, nationalism, faith, hubris and an experience at a celebrity baseball game.

The song cuts. "Great!" crackles the loudspeaker. "Try it again!"

★★★★★

IF YOU'RE NEW to the whole System of a Down phenomenon, a quick primer might be helpful. Imagine the "mamma mia" section of Queen's "Bohemian Rhapsody" set to a Bulgarian wedding dance as played by Slayer and punctuated with a gaggle of vocal personal ads ranging from TV pitchmen to agitprop hucksters to death-metal growlers to a muezzin calling the faithful to prayer—basically, Gilbert and Sullivan at Ozzfest. Weird, right? Now imagine it selling five million copies.

Blending an exotic array of influences

in a powerful, personal way, System of a Down have turned a little ethnic art project into the most vital and avidly followed rock band in L.A. All four members of the band are Armenian, descendants of the large global diaspora of Eastern Europeans forced to flee the bloody, Turk-led ethnic cleansings of 1915–1923. Like most Armenians, System's members have relatives scattered across the globe, many in the Middle East, with guitarist Malakian the only member born in the United States. This obviously affects their sound—which leans to harmonic-minor scales and Middle Eastern-sounding cadences—and makes them an unusually strong unit. Because they are, in the end, a strangely popular subculture of four.

★★★★★

SERJ TANKIAN MAY sing like a channel-surfing opera singer on meth, but the man who greets us at his door—holding back a bounding Husky—is almost hippie-ishly →

AND OUR DEMANDS ARE...

USING SONGS AS POLITICAL SOAPBOXES ISN'T NEW. BUT DOES IT EVER WORK?

1 SEX PISTOLS

PLATFORM: London punks pushing anti-royalist class struggle culminating in a state of total anarchy.

CAMPAIGN SLOGAN: "Anarchy in the U.K./ It's coming sometime ..." ("Anarchy in the U.K.")

RESULT: As yet the U.K. has resisted a descent into anarchy, currently preferring conservative socialism as a political system.

2 SAMMY HAGAR

PLATFORM: Shaggy-haired rocker pleaded for the abolition of the highway speed limit imposed during the 1974 energy crisis.

CAMPAIGN SLOGAN: "When I drive that slow, you know it's hard to steer/And I can't get my car out of second gear" ("I Can't Drive 55")

RESULT: In 1995, Congress repealed the Federal 55-miles-per-hour restriction.

3 PUBLIC ENEMY

PLATFORM: New York rap pioneers very much not down with The Man and his racist fascism. Particularly irked by Arizona's refusal to honor Martin Luther King Jr. with a public holiday.

CAMPAIGN SLOGAN: "I'm waiting for the date/For the man who demands respect/'Cause he was great" ("By the Time I Get to Arizona")

RESULT: The Man still holds sway, but Arizona recognized MLK Day in 1992.



Public Enemy: "Militant? Us?"

4 RAGE AGAINST THE MACHINE

PLATFORM: Livid but principled rap-metallers insisted upon a new trial for convicted Philadelphia cop-killer Mumia Abu-Jamal

CAMPAIGN SLOGAN: "So long as the rope is tight around Mumia's neck/Let there be no rich white life we bound to respect" ("Voice of the Voiceless")

RESULT: In 2001, Abu-Jamal was allowed a new sentence hearing, but not a retrial.

5 TOBY KEITH

PLATFORM: Burlly redneck flag-waver anxious to see the war on terrorism continued with military force in the Middle East.

CAMPAIGN SLOGAN: "You'll be sorry that you messed with the US of A/'Cause we'll put a boot in your ass/It's the American way" ("Courtesy of the Red, White and Blue")

RESULT: 150,000 U.S. troops still on ass-kicking duty in Iraq. BEN MITCHELL

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Stay in with the girls.

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SYSTEM OF A DOWN

laid-back, a soft-spoken 37-year-old in jeans, a black long-sleeve T-shirt and socks. He is friendly and solicitous, speaking softly, with the faintest trace of a foreign accent. His long, vulpine face is framed by a point of moustache-less goatee and a springy mop of shoulder-length curls.

Atop a nearby CD shelf, a boxed set of Slayer looms menacingly over racks of jazz discs by Miles, Monk, Charlie Parker, Billie Holiday. The coffee table is stacked with books and issues of *The Economist*, *The Nation* and other magazines. Apparently, Tankian has about 80 IQ points on the average nü-metal vocalist. Instead of rocking the PlayStation, he reads books—usually three at once, with Noam Chomsky a favorite. Instead of delivering pizza, his pre-rock star day job was, he explains, “developing proprietary vertical industry modular accounting software.” (Rock on!)

Having met in separate groups, System’s members started practicing together in Tankian’s warehouse space in 1995, far from the gaggle of Sunset Strip. But they’d always lived quietly separate lives from most Californians. Tankian, for one, was born in Beirut, a word synonymous to most Americans with “urban war zone.” He was 8 years old when his family moved, but it’s not the kind of childhood you forget. “One thing I can say confidently is that if you’ve ever heard bombs fall in a city, you will have a different sensitivity to dropping bombs on a city,” he says.

Tankian is probably the biggest activist in the band, founding the protest organization Axis for Justice with longtime friend Tom Morello of Rage Against the Machine (and now Audioslave). But, unlike that famously sloganeering group, System’s politics tend to swirl into a denser, less literal-minded miasma of the fears and passions that rule their lives.

“A lot of people don’t realize that we’re at an age where politics isn’t some separate idea that’s unconnected to us,” says Tankian. “Politics affects us whether we like it or not. It’s like the Internet—it’s there whether or not you’re on it. Politics has kind of merged with economics and soci-

ety. I mean, what is the [World Trade Organization]? Is it political, or is it an economic body?”

It’s post-genre, we suggest.

He nods. “That’s what the world is like now.”

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

BACK AT THE video shoot, bassist Shavo Odadjian—director of several System videos and a cameo actor in *Zoolander*—prepares for work, packing a small bowl of weed. Drummer John Dolmayan, a goateed 33-year-old whose slicked-back hair recalls the De Niro of *Godfather 2*, stands nearby. He has been nicknamed “Tarzan” recently, for reasons he can’t quite recall.

“Actually, Serj came up with it,” he says.

You don’t hang out with a chimp? we ask.

"POLITICS AFFECTS US

WHETHER WE LIKE IT OR NOT." SERJ TANKIAN

“Only these three.”

If the rhythm section represents the more rock-dude element of the band, the group’s familial connection overrides all differences. “Our culture and our language definitely bond us,” Tankian said earlier. “Like, if a photographer’s taking our picture and we don’t like him, we’ll mutter a couple of Armenian words and laugh and he won’t know what we’re talking about.” These words come to haunt *Blender*.

“Nah,” says Dolmayan, midway through a discussion with Odadjian. “Aloo-chem-ees set-say.” (Note: *Blender*’s Armenian is a bit rusty.)

“What, is there something going on?” responds Odadjian.

“No!”

“Then what the fuck?”

“But ... fort-zay-gort ...”

“Well ... First of all, inko-inkay-brat-zaggah.”

“OK, een-vara-zaggah, koogera-ammun-mat-zag-ah. Oomehr-at-zaggah.”

“Whatever.”

Hmm, we say, smiling idiotically. We ask Odadjian for his favorite Armenian curse.

He ponders the question for a while. “Lahvad koonum?” he says. “That means ‘Fuck your like- →



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Parrot Bay Coconut Flavored Rum

2 oz. pineapple juice

2 oz. cranberry juice

Combine in a glass over ice.
Stir well.

Pineapple Cosmo

1 1/2 oz. Captain Morgan's
Parrot Bay Pineapple Flavored Rum

1 1/2 oz. cranberry juice

1 squeeze of lime

Combine ingredients in mixing
tin with ice. Shake vigorously.
Strain into martini glass.

Mango Madras

1 1/2 oz. Captain Morgan's
Parrot Bay Mango Flavored Rum

2 oz. cranberry juice

2 oz. orange juice

Shake over ice. Pour into glass.

Captain Morgan's
PARROT BAY

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SYSTEM OF A DOWN

ness.' No, actually, *daht-meht-et koonum*. That's 'Fuck the doctor that gave birth to you.' 'Fuck the guy that delivered your ass.'"

Fuck the obstetrician?
"Yeah. It's pretty deep."

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

LIFE IN SYSTEM of a Down not all fun and cuss words. While even one jam-packed System CD is enough to hold fans for a year, there's an urgency to the group, which is why singer-guitarist Daron Malakian spent much of the last two years writing and recording this bounty, then producing it with longtime collaborator and rap-rock magus Rick Rubin. A refrain in "B.Y.O.B." goes "Blast off/It's party time/And where the fuck are you?"—a challenge not to Bush or Cheney but to anyone unmoved by the world's flux.

Longhaired and heavy-lidded, Malakian slumps on his blue sofa, tools of the trade spread out on the coffee table before him: some electronic car keys, a BlackBerry, bottle of Vitamin B complex and four lighters (lest the nearby bong need igniting). Shy at first, he silently plays an unplugged electric guitar under the beneficent gazes of the John Lennon and Charles Manson posters on his wall. The pantheon of famous Armenian-Americans may stretch from Cher to Jack "Dr. Death" Kevorkian, but only Malakian makes these figures seem like logical bookends, signposts to an avant-jazz death-metal guitarist born in Hollywood.

This is where Malakian wrote most of the new System albums in the years after their previous album was released, on

September 11, 2001. In the corner sits a widescreen TV on which Malakian has avidly watched the changes our nation underwent in the years since. His favorite channels are ESPN and the History Channel.

Oh, you mean the Hitler Channel, cracks Blender.

"Dude!" Malakian says, brightening. "Hitler's fuckin' Mickey Mouse to the History Channel! He's their mascot. It's like, if they're talking about the history of ... wire, or the history of popcorn, they'll say, 'Well, the Nazis ate popcorn!' 'Hitler used wire!' I guess he brings in a lot of ratings. I know I watch his ass."

Like his partner Tankian, Malakian has an especially powerful vantage point for our chapter in history: His close relatives are living in Iraq. "They work in the city," he says. "One's a school-teacher, a couple of my cousins take the bus to work. It's scary. But having family there makes me feel closer to the soldiers and their families."



Playing the
KROQ Weenie
Roast, 2002.



← Blender writer "not getting paid enough for this crap."

To have loved ones in danger, basically."

While Malakian may sing new lyrics like "What's the philosophy of displaced mines/The bombing of all homes and villages," pegging him as some invective-spewing anti-American falls pretty far off the mark. "I'm not this America-hating guy," he says. "I mean, I was born in Hollywood. I'm American. But I'm not one of these crazy Americans, who think that America is the only place on earth." It would indeed be hard to feel that isolated when your cousins go up to American soldiers in Baghdad and say, "Hey, have you heard of System of a Down?" "And they're like, 'How the fuck do you know what that is?'" Malakian says, laughing at the surrealism. "You know, 'You ... Iraqi.'"

Being others who aren't quite Others is part of the creative schizophrenia that powers System of a Down. Another is the mysterious, bicameral minds of Malakian and Tankian: co-lead singers and songwriters who met as children in a

"FOUR ARMENIAN GUYS?"

WHO DO YOU MARKET THAT TO? **DARON MALAKIAN**

private Armenian school, and reunited years later in music. It's something that still puzzles them.

"Me and Serj work together in a very strange way," Malakian says. "We're so opposite, but I can't imagine ever finding another creative relationship like that, ever. It's crazy."

Yet one final mystery stumps Malakian even more, one other confounding vaguery in an ever more complicated and inscrutable world: How did System of a Down become so popular?

"Man, I couldn't tell you that," he says, shaking his head and chuckling. "I mean, four Armenian guys? Who do you market *that* to? And our sound ... like 'B.Y.O.B.'—*that's* a single?"

Looking out his window over a broad L.A. vista, he considers the average person—if such a thing still exists out there—turning the dial and finding a song by his band. He imagines what they'd say in their moment of joyful discovery:

"I can't believe this shit is on the radio!" [BLENDER]

THE PARROT IS CALLING





"I'VE REALLY GOT TO GET SOME NEW BODYGUARDS."

SPEND OUR CASH!

"I'M THE HIP-HOP OPRAH!"

HE'S THE MULTIMILLIONAIRE RAPPER AND MOGUL WHO INVENTED THE TERM "BLING-BLING." BUT ALL **BRYAN "BABY" WILLIAMS** WANTS TO DO WITH HIS \$848 IS TAKE SOME MOMS OUT FOR DINNER. AWWW ...

BY CLARK COLLIS
PHOTOGRAPHY BY MARK PETERSON

"YEAH, WE CAME up with 'bling-bling,'" recalls rapper and Cash Money Records co-owner Bryan "Baby" Williams, sitting in his New Orleans office. "We used to say 'Get your shine on,' and the way we talk, our shit just be trendy, trendy. So we came up with 'bling-bling.'"

And now it's in the dictionary.

"Yeah," says Baby. "Do you think I could go back and make everybody pay me for that shit?"

To be honest, probably not—although such a development might not be the strangest, nor even the most lucrative, chapter in the career of the man who also goes under the monikers "Birdman," "#1 Stunna" and plain ol' Bryan Williams. Raised in New Orleans's notoriously grim Magnolia hous-

ing projects, Baby started Cash Money Records in 1991 with his brother Ronald, and the label enjoyed a string of hits by Juvenile and Lil Wayne, among others. By 1998 it had become so successful that Universal Music paid \$30 million to secure the label's distribution rights. Then, when Cash Money hit something of a commercially barren patch, Baby decided to take matters into his own hands—or rather his "grill"-enhanced mouth—first as half of the rap group Big Tymers and then as a solo artist, selling more than a million copies of his 2002 debut, *Birdman*. With his sophomore CD, *Fast Money*, now in

stores, and more money rolling in from his line of signature Lugz shoes, Baby is unlikely to be short of "bling-bling" any time soon.

"The only reason I haven't got a helicopter is because my neighbors won't let me," Williams explains.

But, while he may have an appreciation of the finer things in life, the Birdman could not be accused of being a Scrooge McDuck. Every Thanksgiving the Williams brothers give away thousands of turkey dinners back in their old 'hood, while a program called Cash Money for Kids allocates sports tickets to underprivileged shorties. And it is in this spirit of philan-

\$848 CHALLENGE!

THE ARTIST
BRYAN "BABY" WILLIAMS

THE MISSION
TO SPEND \$848 IN ONE DAY ANY WAY HE WANTS

THE REASON
BLENDER ASKED HIM TO!



At Emeril's: "Pleeease can I squeeze your cheek?"



The easiest-ever game of "Spot the Gangsta Rapper."



"Hello, is that Facial Tattoo Removals 'R' Us?"

thropy that Baby has decided to spend *Blender's* \$848 taking a dozen or so local mothers out for a dinner at Emeril's, the swanky New Orleans restaurant owned by TV chef Emeril "Kickin' it up a notch!" Lagasse.

The ladies themselves arrived earlier this afternoon and are currently acquainting themselves in a room down the corridor. The group includes Baby's stepmom, Miss Pat, and a few other relations. But most were just walking around town or having their hair done when a Cash Money representative asked if they would care for a free meal. In truth, *Blender* has doubts about whether one or two of the younger ladies are even moms. But it seems mean to start demanding to see baby pictures, given their high spirits. Actually, at least one of Baby's guests may have started "celebrating" early, as is demonstrated by the way in which she wanders into his office and gives him a big hug.

"I'm the hip-hop Oprah!" the rapper says with a grunt, half proud, half terminally embarrassed.

Disentangling himself, Baby leads everyone outside to a stretch Escalade that transports us not more than 100 yards to his luxury tour bus, where champagne is dispensed while we make the drive to Emeril's. On the way, Baby is introduced to the ladies he doesn't know and dispenses warm greetings to those he does. When he disappears to take care of business in his private quarters, one of the ladies cries out with an impromptu rap about how Baby needs to stay "to protect all these grand divas!" She then demands that he sign her to Cash Money.

But despite Baby's absence, the ladies manage to entertain themselves just fine by discovering that their group includes a dental assistant, a community activist and a, uh, drug dealer ("It's true—I'm a pharmacy

technician. Ha!"). Nor do the blasts of hip-hop coming from the bus stereo worry this crowd of largely middle-aged women. In fact, it soon becomes clear that their knowledge of the genre—and, in particular, of Cash Money's output—is formidable.

"That one Baby did with Juvenile—that was old school," announces one mom.

"#1 Stunna!" yells another

"Get your shine on!" declares a third, before reprimanding *Blender* for both the slowness of our champagne-glass-refilling and the unkemptness of our hair.

"If you're from New Orleans and you don't know Cash Money, you're pretty stupid," says yet another mom.

But Baby's face is not a familiar one at Emeril's, where more than one fork pauses

ferent from the records. He shook our hands, he was very warm."

Miss Delores, it transpires, has skipped her regular Bible-study class to be here. But she has a far more serious, and tragic, reason for doing so than merely the desire for a free meal of Emeril's feed.

"My son Marlon, who passed two years ago, he loved Cash Money," she explains. "He was playing basketball and he had a massive heart attack. That was tough. So I'm really here for him."

Meanwhile, in between bites of his breaded grouper entrée, Baby explains just why he is compelled to collect not just cars but also good karma through his work with underprivileged New Orleans citizens.

"Knowing where I come from, I'm feeling the need to go back and let them see that you can make it," he says. "Because, if I can make it, it gives hope to other people. And there

were a lot of times when we didn't think we were going to make it. But we weather the storms. Just trying to reach for the stars, you know what I'm saying? Just going through our normal life—like a crab in a bucket."

The meal over, Baby signs autographs and poses for photos before leading the ladies out to the stretch Escalade, which has appeared to whisk them back to their homes.

"I had a good time," he says, before getting back on to his tour bus. "It feels good giving back to the moms."

And as for the ladies?

"It was great," says Delores, who, like most of her fellow moms, is clutching a neatly wrapped carton of leftovers. "I said to Baby, I'm happy to do this anytime!"

What did he say?

"He laughed—so I guess that doesn't mean anytime soon!" [BLENDER]

"MY NEIGHBORS WON'T LET ME HAVE A HELICOPTER."

among the largely white clientele when Baby arrives in the company of not just the ladies but also his fearsome-looking security detail. The waiters, however, couldn't be more accommodating as they seat our party and answer Baby's ten gazillion queries about a menu they haven't even had a chance to give him yet. A human sponge when it comes to information, the rapper is perennially asking questions, whether he's barking them down his pair of perpetually in-use cellphones, grilling *Blender* about the publishing industry or politely enquiring whether everything is OK with the ladies.

Baby has clearly won some new fans thanks to this latter courtesousness.

"When he came on the bus, what I felt was a warmth," says a mom named Delores. "Being close to him, he's very dif-

HOW HE SPENT IT

BABY
EMERIL'S RESTAURANT
MARCH 31, 2005

DINNER	\$848
TOTAL	\$848



BRIAN

A.J.

NICK

KEVIN

HOWIE

GOD CREATED MAN. MAN CREATED

music. And some men—priests, probably—created the all-boy choir, cute, hairless little fellas who sing like angels. That was the story until the 20th century, when Motown capo Berry Gordy realized the commercial power of an all-singing, all-dancing choir. And so the Jackson 5 were formed, who begat New Edition, who begat New Kids on the Block, who begat the term “boy band.”

Grunge temporarily forestalled the dominance of harmonizing hardbodies, but in the mid-1990s a new strain of Disney-suckled lads paved their own Chitlin’ Circuit—the shopping centers of Europe—and soon set their sight on the piggybanks of a swelling economic demographic: suburban ‘tween girls. The first, and best, of this breed were five young men—Nick Carter, A.J. McLean, Howie Dorough, Kevin Richardson and Richardson’s cousin Brian Littrell—who called themselves the Backstreet Boys, in honor of a flea market in their hometown of Orlando, Florida.

After two years topping charts overseas, the Backstreet Boys conquered America, opening the floodgates for other still-virginal alumni of the *Mickey Mouse Club* and turning the end of the century into an estrogen-soaked pop apocalypse. Expertly aided by the best songwriters and producers Sweden had to offer, Backstreet, along with ‘N Sync, Britney Spears and Christina Aguilera, made music as sublimely disposable as the Monkees or Abba. Naturally, they made millions and millions

of dollars. Along the way, though, the five squeaky-clean heartthrobs suffered a painful and public divorce from the sven-gali who created them, brushes with death, drinking, drugging, DUIs, AA and a close encounter with Paris Hilton.

Now, with the release of *Never Gone*, their first LP since 2001, Backstreet’s back, alright! “I don’t know one person you could meet on the street, from a punk to a Metallica fan, who hasn’t heard of the Backstreet Boys,” says A.J. McLean. “They might not like us, but they know who we are.”

This is their story.



Louis J. Pearlman knew a thing or two about hot air. In the 1980s, he built the advertising blimps that used to fly around Florida, but his real passion was ignited when New Kids on the Block flew on one of the chartered private jets that were part of the multimillionaire’s Trans Continental Airlines. “I’m gonna get me one of those,” Pearlman told himself. And in 1992, he put an ad in the local entertainment trade papers announcing auditions for a pop group. ➔

THE SECRET HISTORY OF THE BACKSTREET BOYS

"WE WERE KIDS IN A CANDY STORE"

ONCE UPON A TIME, THERE WERE FIVE WHOLESOME YOUNG MEN WHO SANG, DANCED AND MADE MILLIONS OF GIRLS SQUEAL IN PRE-ORGASMIC DELIGHT. THEN THEY SNORTED SOME EIGHT BALLS, SUED THEIR SVENGALI AND WOUND UP IN REHAB AND DINNER THEATER. NOW THE BACKSTREET BOYS ARE TELLING THEIR STORY IN THEIR OWN WORDS—AND EVEN THEY CAN HARDLY BELIEVE IT ...

BY DAVID KEEPS



BACKSTREET BOYS

A.J. MCLEAN I was the first boy in the Backstreet Boys, in 1992. It was me, then Howie and Nick, and in 1993 Kevin and Brian showed up.

HOWIE DOROUGH At the time I was using the stage name Tony Donetti, and a casting agent got me a private audition with Lou Pearlman at his house. There were gates and a Rolls in front and I thought I'd died and gone to heaven. This was in August. December rolls around and I have a new agent who wants me to go on this audition, and I get there and it's Lou again, and he says, "Tony! Where have you been? We've been looking all over for you!" After that I never used a stage name again.

NICK CARTER When I was 10, I did halftime shows at Tampa Bay Buccaneers games. I sang the national anthem and a really gay song, "Rockin' Around the Christmas Tree."

DOROUGH Originally the idea was that they were going to have seven people as an insurance policy in case someone got sick.

Like, "Tonight, ladies and gentlemen, sitting in for Howie, it's Joe Blow from down the street." We had two guys, Sam [Licata] and Charles [Edwards] that I knew from college choir. Chris Kirkpatrick from 'N Sync was another tenor in the choir, and he would always ask me when he would get to audition.

KEVIN RICHARDSON I was working at Disney World, playing Aladdin, Prince Eric, a Ninja Turtle, Sweetums from the Muppets, Sebastian the Crab. I never got bored. At night I worked at a dinner theater, so between the two I was doing pretty good.

BRIAN LITRELL Kevin worked at Capone's, where he was this old pimpy actor who sang and danced and ate pasta. He had been a Backstreet Boy for maybe a month or two and they were looking for a fifth member. On April 19, 1993, this young girl came in from the school office and said I had a telephone call. It was Kevin, and the

very next morning I flew from Kentucky to Orlando. My mom grabbed me by the neck and said, "Listen, son, you can get your feet wet, just don't drown."

JOHNNY WRIGHT (CO-MANAGER, 1993-1997; 2003-PRESENT) I was in Germany working with a group called Snap, and when I came home to Orlando, people were saying, "You've got to hear this group, they're like New Kids." Having managed New Kids, I said, "Been there, done that." But I heard about the guy who was backing them; you couldn't go anywhere in Florida without seeing his blimps, and after I saw a videotape of the Backstreet Boys performing at Sea World, I decided to meet them. I go to this restaurant and Lou is there, but no group. Then they come through the kitchen doors, singing a capella!

CARTER Everywhere we'd go, we'd just sing, *bam*, drop of a hat.

WRIGHT They had recorded a few songs, but this was the grunge era and a lot of the record companies didn't even want to see the group. I needed to prove that there was going to be a fan base. The way to do that was to go city to city, school to school. They did 18 weeks of shows for SADD, Students Against Destructive Decisions, sometimes three schools a day. They never had a bad show.

CARTER [Sarcastically] Right. Kids were booing us, going crazy: "Get the fuck off the stage!" Throwing shit at us.

DENISE MCLEAN SOLIS (A.J.'S MOTHER) Sometimes the boys would sing in the cafeteria during lunch period, and we had cassettes that we gave out. I actually printed the jackets for the tapes on my home computer. I toured on this little rickety bus—it wasn't even the band bus, it was a crew bus—making sure they stayed warm and did their homework.

DOROUGH I can't say we roughed it by living



Mark your calendars: Prepubescent girls swarm Orlando City Hall on Backstreet Boys Day, October 7, 1998.



So innocent. So awkward: the Boys in 1996.

out of a van or eating Spam for two weeks. But I had to deal with everybody else's odors, and we had words and sometimes fistfights.

LITTRELL We would always get on Nick for not sharing the Nintendo. He was quite selfish when he was 13.



In 1995, a talent scout by the name of Dave McPherson, who had been an early fan of the Backstreet Boys and tried to sign them to Mercury Records, took a job at Jive Records and brought them to the label. They were sent to Sweden to record with producer Denniz Pop, who put Ace of Base on the map.

RICHARDSON Grunge was really big at the time. The record company said, "Why don't we send you guys over to Europe? There is a big wave of this type of boy band." We didn't even know what that meant.

CARTER There were tons! They had Take That, Westlife, Boyzone, Five. But everybody in America was like, "Fuck that! We want Nirvana." Denniz and [BSB co-producer] Max Martin always spoke in Swedish, so you

could never understand a word they said. It was probably "These fucking American kids suck."

DOROUGH In Sweden and Germany we were like kids in a candy store. I was like, I'm not getting nothing back home, might as well be having fun out here.

CARTER I was just a teenager on the road, meeting chicks. My mom traveled with me until I was 14, and then all of a sudden when I turned 15, 16, I got some attitude. All the guys were partying. I wanted to party with them.

WRIGHT In one airport in Germany we were going through security and this girl literally jumped on the belt to go through the X-ray machine to get to the guys.

DOROUGH I used to bring home these German teen mags to prove we were successful. Half of them have nudity. Mom and dad didn't really care too much for that.

RICHARDSON We'd get back to Orlando and no one knew us. It was like [makes cricket sound]. We called it No Fan Land.

LITTRELL That didn't last long. A.J. and I were in the mall in Orlando and a busload of Brazilian high school girls had just been dropped off and we were just bum rushed.

WRIGHT They had to have seven bodyguards, one for each of them, one swing guy and an advance man who would check out everywhere they went. In Latin America people would attack the buses. We would have the sunroofs open to get air and hear ba-domp-ba-doomp and then see faces and bodies trying to squeeze through the sunroof.

JANET KLEINBAUM (SENIOR VP, ARTIST MARKETING AND VIDEO

PRODUCTION, JIVE RECORDS) In the early days we would take industry people and fly them overseas to see a show. We knew it would translate to the United States.

DOROUGH We made a video for "We've Got It Going On." MTV wouldn't touch it with a 10-foot pole. [Director] Nigel Dick came up with a concept for the video shoot for "Quit Playing Games With My Heart." [The Boys, performing in a downpour, T-shirts soaked through.] I don't think it was a mission to go out there as Chippendale dancers. At the time I did have a four- to six-pack, so I gave them a little skin.

LITTRELL Our gay videos? Well, we had to have a little bit of sex appeal, because we really hadn't made an impact in the U.S.; everybody thought we were from London. Howie and A.J.'s shirts were water-soluble, though.

KLEINBAUM Once it ignited, it got crazy. I remember when the first album came out, there were thousands of fans in Times Square for *TRL*. Police had to come to the studio and tell the guys not to go near the windows and wave.

CARSON DALY (FORMER HOST OF MTV'S *TOTAL REQUEST LIVE*) It was gigantic. Mass hysteria.

KLEINBAUM Girls were everywhere. They would hang around outside the record company. One of them got my home number and called

in the middle of the night to sing "Happy Birthday" to Brian. Like I was a direct line to the group.

MCLEAN Lou's vision for us was as a clean-cut, picture-perfect, all-American looking band—no facial hair, no tattoos, no earrings. And we couldn't have girlfriends. We became role models. That's a big fucking stress.



In 1997, Littrell underwent open-heart surgery in the midst of the group's first big U.S. headlining tour. The following year, Denniz Pop, their musical mentor, died, leaving the Backstreet sound in the hands of his protégé, Max Martin. And other members of the band were going through personal crises.

LITTRELL I was born with a heart murmur. It sounded like a washing machine through the stethoscope—wishy-washy instead of a deep, strong beat. Because of the stress that I was undergoing, my heart was enlarging to the size of a six-foot-five, 300-pound man. And I'm five-eight, 150. I was back on stage eight weeks to the day of my surgery. Tickets had been sold. When you become successful you're not really a human being any more. You're an object.

CARTER Schedules got crazy, hustle, hustle, hustle. It got me depressed. I had a weight problem big-time and I'd obsessively drink. I was escaping from my problems and my family. →



"I WAS
STRESSED OUT
AND SAD.
I CRIED A LOT."

NICK CARTER

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BACKSTREET BOYS BY THE NUMBERS

COUNTING DOWN THE BSB'S ALBUM SALES, UNFORTUNATE TATTOOS AND REHAB STAYS.



Number of **ALBUMS SOLD WORLDWIDE**:

75 MILLION

Number of **GRAMMYS WON**:

0

Number of **ORIGINAL OFFICIAL BAND MEMBERS** (including manager Lou Pearlman, who, thanks to a shareholders agreement, received one-sixth of the band's revenue in addition to his management fee):

6

NUMBER OF SIGNATURES on a petition pleading with the band to play Hamilton, Ontario, on their 2000 *Millennium* tour:

25,000

AMOUNT PAID in an eBay auction for four *Millennium* tour tickets:

\$4,550

AMOUNT OF MONEY the band claimed their 1997 European tour earned:

\$10 MILLION

THE AMOUNT THEY CLAIMED to have actually received from the tour when they sued Lou Pearlman in 1998:

\$300,000

Year that A.J. McLean first "got into" **COCAINE**:

2000

Year that A.J. McLean first checked himself into **REHAB**:

2001

Number of **"PARIS" TATTOOS** Nick Carter got on his wrist while going out with Paris Hilton:

1

NUMBER OF WEEKS after Carter got the tattoo that the couple split:

3

Number of **REFERENCES TO "BALL GAGS"** in Backstreet Boys gay fan fiction story "Get You Back":

8

Number of **PAGES** in 2001's *Fans of the Millennium*, a book written by, and about, Backstreet Boys fans:

792

Number of pages in the Bantam Classics edition of **MOBY-DICK**:

704

Number of **BAND MEMBERS** who probably wouldn't have cameo-ed in 2002 shark movie *Megalodon* had their wife not been the star:

1

Number of **HOTELS** currently owned by Howie Dorough:

5



TRL, October 2000:
The girls even love
the homely one.

When you come from a family that never had much, money and power become this crazy beast. I was stressed out and sad. I cried a lot. I didn't want to do it anymore.

MCLEAN When I was 19, I was wearing sunglasses, had a ring on every finger, sideburns and tattoos. That's when the hair started going red and pink and I had my lip pierced. I was having sex with groupies. Brian and Kevin were about to get married. Howie was getting into real estate. Nick was playing videogames. I felt like that Sesame Street song—one of these things just doesn't belong.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Before the release of their second U.S. album, *Millennium*, the Backstreet Boys had already raked in millions from sales of CDs, concert tickets and merchandise, prompting them to take a hard look at the contract they had signed with Lou Pearlman. Meanwhile, 'N Sync, who were also managed by Johnny Wright, were blowing up.

MCLEAN We did a show years ago with the Temptations, and one of them said, "This is show business. Just make sure while you're onstage doing your show, your business isn't walking out the back door."



LITRELL I was getting only one-sixth of the earnings, because there were six members in the group at that time. Contractually, Lou was the sixth Backstreet Boy.

WRIGHT They started to have questions about their finances. That's when the shit hit the fan.

DENISE MCLEAN We trusted Lou to make decisions. We really didn't know anything about the industry. Eventually Brian's parents instigated a lawsuit to get the information. The bombshell was all our recoupable bills. They were huge.

RICHARDSON We had to learn what *recoupable* meant.

DENISE MCLEAN It hit them very deeply, especially Kevin, who was close to Lou because he had lost his dad. This was like a having a family member



Long before 50 Cent, Kevlar vests became the stagewear of choice for discriminating boy bands.

Howie and his proud mama, May 1999.

come in and chop you off at the knees.

LITRELL We were threatened that anything and everything would be taken away from us.

RICHARDSON You've heard of double-dipping? Well, I'm telling you, there was *double double-dipping*.

WRIGHT It got really messy. It was hurtful to turn on MTV and hear my name being dragged through the mud. I settled with the Backstreet Boys and I put my attentions toward 'N Sync. And that didn't suck.

MCLEAN The only reason we parted ways with Johnny was because he signed 'N Sync and we got jealous.

DOROUGH We were having first-child syndrome: Now we had a brother and weren't getting as much attention as we used to.

WRIGHT It was great for the scandal mongers. There was a time when the fans loved Backstreet and 'N Sync. Now they had to choose sides.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

In May 1999, their suit against Pearlman settled, the Backstreet Boys released *Millennium*, which smashed a record set by Garth Brooks by selling 1.13 million albums in its first week of release. The group was on top again, but there would be a price to pay.

MCLEAN We had finally decided we needed to be businessmen, too, which just added to the stress. This was on top of our relentless traveling, on top of my low self-esteem, insecurity, depression and anxiety. Around '99 I'd have a bottle to two bottles of Jack Daniel's a day, starting at nine, 10 in the morning. I was just in a constant blackout. Things come back to me periodically, but for the most part I don't remember a damn thing.

LITRELL I got married during the *Millennium* tour. There was so much craziness. We'd be in a hotel and a mom comes over and says, "You owe my daughter this autograph." And I'm thinking, "Wait a second. I put my heart and soul into this

record and you're going to pin me against the hotel back door at 2:30 in the morning when my wife and I are trying to walk our dogs?" What kind of example is that?

CARTER Towards the end of the *Millennium* tour I started getting mentally and physically sick. My body started running down after six years of non-stop busting ass. We named the next album *Black and Blue* because we felt like fucking punching bags. After *Black and Blue* came out in November of 2000, I started getting pretty crazy. I got arrested and all that shit.

MCLEAN The first time I tried coke was the night that we shot "The Call" video. I was a little hungover and a buddy of mine was like, "Dude, I've got a pick-me-

up." I grabbed a little bit of his coke and I put it on my room key and I tried it. When I went back home I drove into, like, the ghetto of Orlando in my Mercedes fucking 600, and my friend said, "You're going to get jumped, you're like this glowing beacon of bling-bling." But I loved coke and stuck with it.

DENISE MCLEAN He wasn't my son anymore. He was turning into this ... this ... person.

MCLEAN I was a slob. People would come to my house, there'd be shit stains on the porch from my dog. During the *Black and Blue* tour rehearsals, they literally broke into my house and poured a bucket of ice water on my head to wake me up because I was in a coke coma.

DENISE MCLEAN We had three or four interventions with him, even before he started with the drugs.

MCLEAN I was doing an eight ball or two every night. Then I would take three or four Xanax to help me sleep. I would have strippers come by my house. I was king ding-a-ling. I don't know how many times I drove drunk and high. I could easily have fallen into my pool or down my stairs or decided to kill myself.

CARTER I didn't really understand what was going →

"I WAS DOING AN EIGHT BALL OR TWO EVERY NIGHT."

A.J. MCLEAN

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on. I never realized something like this could happen to somebody you love.

MCLEAN We each had our own buses on tour. I thought I was untouchable. At first nobody really knew about my drug use except for Kevin, because there was a night in New York when he was in his hotel room with [photographer] David La-Chapelle, Pamela Anderson and Kid Rock. And I pulled Kevin into the bathroom and said, "Dude, do you want to do a line?" He's like, "I really hope you're not doing coke." Oh no no no, I was just asking to see if you would. And then I went to my room and did it all myself. Then came the weekly drug tests. They were trying to catch me. I started paying crew guys for their piss because mine was positive every time. And the one time I forgot to do it, I got nailed.

DENISE MCLEAN When he called me from the tour that day, I was hoping it's not the phone call that every parent dreads. I was relieved when I heard his voice. He said, "I'm done with this. I want to come home, Mom," I said, "Unfortunately, that's not where you need to go."

DALY They showed up at *TRL* with very little warning. We cleared the set and brought in some stools. A.J. was crying. He announced he was taking some time off to get professional help. It was a bit of a shock to me. I'd seen rock people shoot up, but I never thought one of the Backstreet Boys had it in him to party that hard.

MCLEAN The very next day, July 9, 2001, I was in rehab. The guys were thinking, "Maybe we should just say he broke his leg, or he's got walking pneumonia." And I said to them, "Let's tell the truth. It's going to come out anyway."

JANET KLEINBAUM A.J.'s crisis fell under the category of personal issues, but he made it public and I respect his choice.

MCLEAN Sisqo was opening up for us, and one of our managers said, "What do you think if we ask Sisqo to replace A.J.?" I'm like, "What the fuck are you thinking?"

LITRELL I remember we got off stage in Japan and we talked about taking the holidays and reconvening some time in February to record a new record. Everybody was tired, fed up with the business and even one another. Then we found out through the grapevine that Nick was making a solo record.

CARTER I got kind of selfish for a little bit there. I had been doing this since I was 12



years old; I just wanted to pick up the guitar and make rock music. I didn't give a fuck if it sold one record.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Carter's solo bow, *Now or Never*, was released in the fall of 2002 and sold only a few more than one record. BSB were kinda-sorta broken up.

Brian became a dad, Kevin appeared in the Broadway musical *Chicago*, Howie began developing condos and hotels. And A.J. had one last dance with the devil.

MCLEAN I was going to get married and I freaked out. Instead of postponing the wedding, I went ahead and cheated on my fiancée. I didn't know any other way to get out of it. I relapsed with marijuana, which I hated, and prescription pills. I went into my cabinet and took two Vicodin, two Percoset, two Darvoset, two Ambien and smoked a frickin' bowl. And for about six months I went on a rampage with Playmates and porn stars. Every week I was in the *Enquirer*: "BACKSTREET BOY BOUNCES FROM BUNNY TO BUNNY."

LITRELL I've had talks with all the guys about searching for something that you're never really going to find, because people want you for who you are as a Backstreet Boy rather than who you are as a person. I decided to get on with my life. When you come to my home in Atlanta, you don't find Backstreet Boys records plastered everywhere. You find fine antiques and a 1912 Steinway baby grand piano.



"YOU'VE HEARD OF DOUBLE-DIPPING? THERE WAS DOUBLE DOUBLE-DIPPING."

KEVIN RICHARDSON

MCLEAN I've been sober since October 23, 2002. I still look at myself as just a regular Joe, from Palm Beach, Florida, who can sing and dance. I stay home, I write music, I play golf. I'm not anxious anymore. I'm relaxed to the point of being comatose.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

The boy-band gold-rush led so successfully by the Backstreet Boys had now all but dried up. While 'N Sync's Justin Timberlake enjoyed solo success, the other members of the *TRL* brigade were left dreaming of space travel and sucking face with Paris Hilton. None of which sat well with Brian Littrell.

LITRELL I like to call myself very instrumental in our coming back together. I was in the process of working on a pop gospel solo CD. And the powers that be were like, "Is there any chance for another Backstreet Boys record?" And we started making phone calls to each other.

WRIGHT In late 2003 I got a call asking if I'd be interested in putting the team together again. We had a meeting and cleared the air for the first 30 minutes. And as soon as that was over it was like where we were 11 years ago.

MCLEAN My relationship with everyone is better now than it has been in the entire 11 years that we've been together. I'm still a nut job—I still have parties. I just do it sober. Brian and his family came to my house last night, and I cooked them dinner. That would have never happened years ago.

WRIGHT A.J. has become the father figure. Even with the negative press going on with Nick, A.J. is putting his arms around him and saying, "Hey, I've been down that road before."

MCLEAN Nick is going through a transitional period. He's 24 years old, he's dealt with a lot of shit with his family. And then, dating Paris Hilton, that didn't go as planned. That was just a bad thing.

DENISE MCLEAN As a parent, I feel he's out there on his own and he's still pretty young for that. He needs somebody in his life, a young woman who can steer him in the right direction.

CARTER With great success comes great problems. We had to actually go through something to get here. Everybody knows that, but I didn't figure it out until now. The most valuable thing is we're back to the basics, like when we first started. It's like being mad dogs all over again. [BLENDER]



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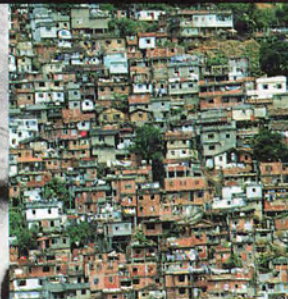
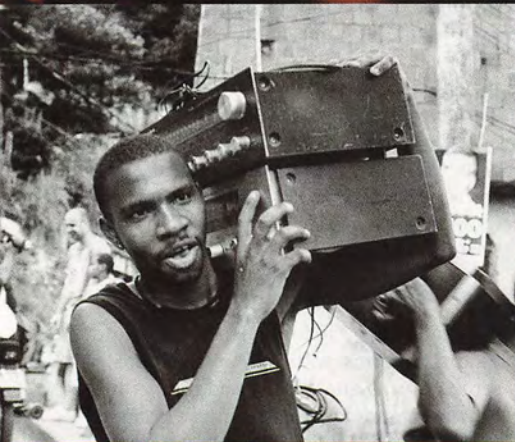
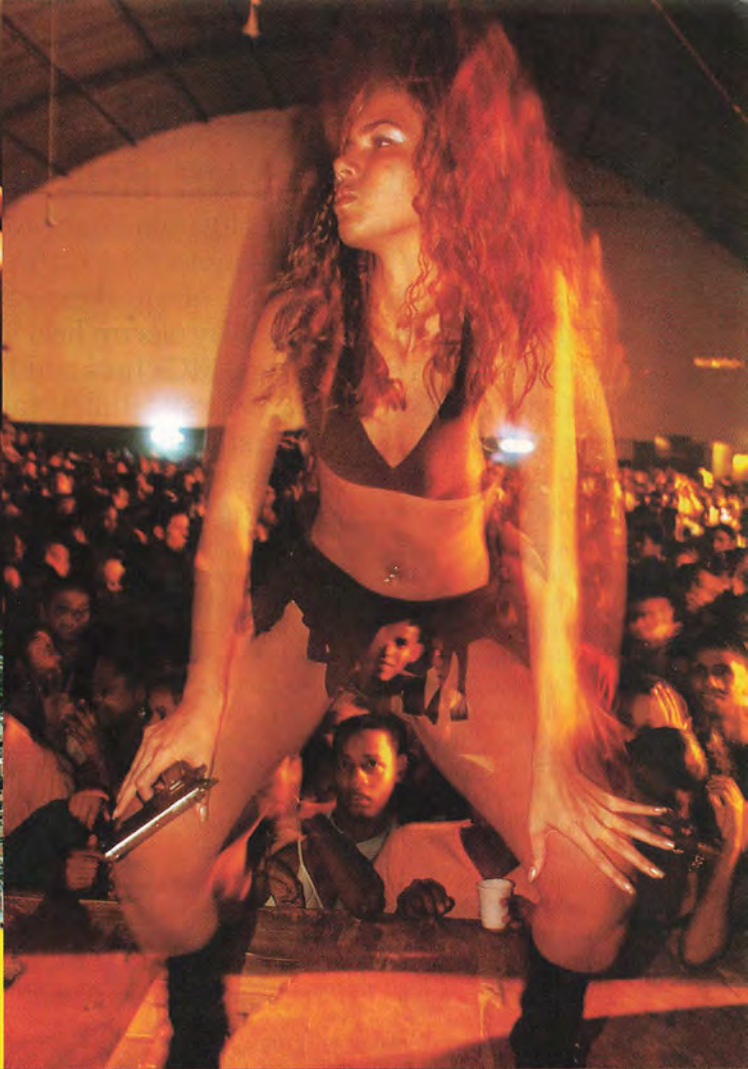
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COKE. GUNS. BOOTY. BEATS.

IN THE SLUMS OF RIO DE JANEIRO, DRUG LORDS ARMED WITH SUBMACHINE GUNS HAVE JOINED FORCES WITH DJS ARMED WITH MASSIVE SOUND SYSTEMS AND RUDE, RAUNCHY SINGLES. WELCOME TO THE MOST EXCITING—AND DANGEROUS—UNDERGROUND CLUB SCENE IN THE WORLD.

BY ALEX BELLOS
PHOTOGRAPHY BY DANIELA DACORSO



Clockwise from top left: Revelers show approval by waving gun and gang gestures; a dancer wields a (prop) gun; the audience at Eskema, a club outside Rio; cramped favelas; a helper sets up.



FIVE A.M.: IN THE SULTRY DEPTHS

of Rio de Janeiro's Nova Holanda shantytown—or *favela* (pronounced fuh-VELL-luh)—more than 1,000 people are dancing in a narrow street. A wall of speakers stacked 15 feet high and 60 feet wide sends a dirty electro beat shuddering through the ground. On a tiny stage, MCs Juca and Paulinho* shout out the lyrics of their hit “24 Hours”: “Bullets into the *Terceiro*,” they say in chorus. “Shoot the snitch!” Suddenly the crackle of gunfire cuts through the bass: From the middle of the swaying crowd, someone is shooting into the air.

A sea of hands goes up: The men point their index fingers and cock their thumbs, waving imaginary guns over their heads. Other hands form into C and V shapes—the Rio gang sign of the *Comando Vermelho*, the “Red Command” drug faction that runs this *favela*.

On the stage beside Juca and Paulinho stands a young man in his early 20s; he has a pencil moustache, wears an expensive blue T-shirt with a picture of a surfer on the front and is holding a submachine gun. He smiles with approval at the show.

An hour later, as the two MCs leave, the party is still going strong; Juca and Paulinho pass two teenage boys who are dancing together, waving their pistols in the air.

Back in their car, Juca shrugs off the gunplay. Anyone brought up in the *favela* is used to the sound of guns, he says. “And anyway, if the guy shoots in the air, it means he likes the song.”

Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, is the glamorous city of Carnival, the statue of Christ the Redeemer and Copacabana beach. But the poorest fifth of its residents—about a million people, many of them black—live in the *favelas*, the claustrophobic brick shantytowns that cover the hills and sprawl chaotically out for miles into its outskirts. In the *favelas*, the city police have effectively relinquished control to armed drug factions, who run their territory according to their own strict codes. Estimates put the

number of young men involved in drug trafficking at between 20,000 and 100,000. It's just like the movie *City of God*—only much more violent.

The music of choice in the *favelas* is “Rio funk.” A hard-edged dance style of screeching raps and booty-shaking beats, it's the bastard child of Miami bass music (think “Whoop! (There It Is)”), which arrived here in the mid-1980s and went native. “The heavy bass sounded really good and started to influence us,” says 42-year-old DJ Marlboro, who recorded the first Rio funk album in 1989. Dance music has run through the *favelas* since the '70s, when Rio's first outdoor mega-parties began, playing American soul, disco and funk. These *baile* [pronounced BYE-lee] funk balls became an established part of Rio's nightlife, and when DJs like Marlboro started to put out their own records, *bailes* became the platform for the new sound. Now there are at least a dozen DJ crews with enormous speaker systems putting on more than 100 *bailes* every weekend. With these parties attracting an estimated 100,000 people per week, funk is the largest youth movement in the country.

Baile funk customizes raw, guttural Miami rhythms with percussive loops of samba drums and a lively and unrelenting Brazilian rapping style. It's music designed to be played as loud as possible throughout the sweltering tropical night. Recently, however, it has also been finding success in colder climes.

In boutique record stores, adventure-some radio stations and hipster clubs across America, *baile* funk has become the dance import du jour, an underground equivalent to Jamaican dancehall's mainstream invasion. For music fans in constant search of exotic kicks, it's *I Heart the '80s* gone gangsta: a retro-minded hedonism borne of violence, drugs and poverty. Dance artists from Sri Lankan darling M.I.A. to British DJ Fatboy Slim have tapped the genre in their own music. “It's totally undiluted folk music,” says Diplo, one-half of the celebrated Philadelphia DJ crew Hollertronix. A frequent visitor to Rio, Diplo released the excellent *Favela on Blast: Rio Baile Funk '04* mix tape. “The only concern for these artists is, ‘What's gonna make the girls dance, throw their clothes onto the stage and wanna have sex?’”

A few days after the party in Nova Holanda, Juca invites *Blender* to his *favela*, which lies on a hill about 15 miles from downtown Rio. He doesn't want the details of where he lives to be revealed, and has to ask permission from the local boss of the Red Command to speak to a journalist; as we talk, a small group of armed men perch in the darkness 25 yards away, eyeing the interview. “They're not evil people,” Juca

BAILE FUNK 101

DIPLO—THE VIRTUOSO PHILLY DJ BEHIND THE *FAVELA ON BLAST* MIX TAPE—HANDPICKS FIVE TRACKS ESSENTIAL TO ANY FUNK COLLECTION WORTH ITS BASS.

1

PYRAMIDE DISCO

“RAP DE PARADA DE LUCAS”

“This is one of the oldest ones I know, from '89, '90, when the scene kind of started. It's all these little kids singing this famous, old-school Brazilian soccer chant, *Ole Ole Ole!*, over a Miami bass beat.”

2

TATI QUEBRA BARRACO

“KABO KAKI”

“Tati is queen of the scene, this big lady who sounds like a little girl. There are a lot of female artists down there: Their vocals are a lot hyper than your average dude just rapping.”

3

GAIOLA DAS POPOZUDAS

“O DARCY”

“‘Popozuda’ means ‘big fat ass.’ This came out in the last two years, and it's really heavy. There's a girl singing and guys screaming, with handclaps all the way through, like a dancehall riddim. It's great, it's so noisy.”

4

OS CARRASCOS

“BOCHECHO ARDENDO REMIX”

“They're a really big group—they have some official releases, as opposed to artists who only put out stuff on minidisks. It's just booty bass and this really nice Eurythmics-esque synth line, with a girl singing through a vocoder.”

5

BONDE DA CATUCA

“APRENDER DANÇAR”

“This one's current. It's a straight rip of Rick James's ‘Super Freak.’ Funk songs basically draw from any old-school club tune—I've found some really hard songs that sample Morrissey and New Order!”



explains. "They just get into crime because of the lack of other options."

Juca—24, and married with two children—sits in the small square where during the day he makes his living hosing down cars. He's just starting out as a funk MC, on the back of "24 Hours," which he wrote together with Paulinho, his 19-year-old brother. The track has recently become an anthem in areas controlled by the Red Command. Now the duo are in demand every weekend to play at *bailes*, where they earn \$50 a gig—as much as Juca earns in a week at the carwash.

In some *favelas*, the drug factions process an estimated \$1 million a month, mostly from cocaine trafficking. They bankroll the *bailes* as a way of showing that they're investing in their communities. But Juca is more cynical: "*Bailes* are profit-making exercises," he says. "They attract customers to the *favela* to buy their drugs."

Even so, Juca knows that he owes his success to the factions. "The best way to get a break is to sing something that pleases the traffickers. It's sad. I'd prefer to sing about poverty or protest, but no one's interested." In Juca's case, the Red Command liked "24 Hours" so much that they paid to have it recorded, and distributed 1,000

"The doorway to recognition is through funk": MC Paulinho and his brother Juca.



copies of the CD. The lyrics are a tribute to jailed faction leaders Marcinho and Elias Maluco; Maluco is accused of ordering the 2002 murder of an undercover TV reporter who was investigating *baile funk*s. The story goes that he was sliced into pieces with a Samurai sword.

Funk songs used to pay homage to those who had died, but now it is fashionable to name-check those still alive. Juca is

often asked by drug soldiers to write lyrics that include their names. "They like it because being in a song raises your profile. The better you're known, the more girls you'll attract. It's crazy the amount of girls you get if you're in the faction."

Throughout the '80s, the funk scene was largely ignored by the mainstream media—because it was happening in the *favelas*, out of the public eye. There is a →

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A SWIFT KICK TO THE GLANDS.



THE CURIOUSLY STRONG SOUR GUM

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"IF A GUY SHOOTS HIS GUN IN THE AIR,

snobbery against popular culture in Brazil, the result of the cavernous gap in wealth between the mostly white rich and the mostly black poor. Funk, however, got noticed at the end of the 1990s with the emergence at some balls of the "corridor of death." At certain *bailes*, groups of men began to divide themselves into two sides and face each other across the dance floor. After taunting each other by swaying and shadow-boxing in a syncopated way, each side would then start to trade kicks and punches across the "corridor" that separated them. Security guards stood by, and when the fighting got out of control they would use whips and sticks to restore order.

Media outrage at the violence of the corridors—which were blamed for several

deaths—caused politicians to clamp down on funk. In 2000, the Rio state assembly passed a law setting strict conditions under which *bailes* could take place, such as obligatory metal detectors and military police presence. "They are demands that are not made for parties with any other type of music," says Orlando Zaccone, head of the Rio police's 19th Precinct. "And of course, the law demanded the impossible."

The repression of funk meant that *bailes*, rather than not taking place at all, instead took place deeper inside the *favelas*, where police exerted even less control. The corridors disappeared at a price, as funk was embraced by the drug factions with open arms. "It was like handing over the treasure to the criminals," says Zaccone.

Just as gangsta rap was closely aligned with L.A.'s gang culture, Rio funk has become the soundtrack of organized crime.

Later, Juca introduces *Blender* to his friend Johnny, who lives in a tiny two-room apartment in a concrete building opposite the carwash. At the top of a narrow, pitch-black staircase, Johnny has built his own studio: a secondhand computer, a microphone and an old speaker. Most *baile* funk records are initially recorded in places like this. Johnny has taught himself to make crude cut-and-pastes samples using basic pirated software: Songs are constructed like a sequence of jingles, with shouted lyrics above the heavy samba drum sound of the *tamborão*. Even in DJ Marlboro's studio, which is the best-equipped, the songs have an underproduced, disposable quality. For Marlboro, they'd have to: In 16 years, he's recorded almost 3,000 songs.

It is after midnight, and Juca says it's time to go to the neighborhood's regular Sunday night *baile*. The *baile* is at the top of the hill, where a bend in the street has created a large space between ramshackle homes. There's a gigantic wall of speakers and, again, more than 1,000 young people dancing, flirting and hanging out. Cocaine use is not overt, although maybe a fifth of the crowd are snorting it. Most of the songs glorify the Red Command, and many list the names of its leaders. It's against Brazilian law to promote crime in song lyrics, which makes most of these funk tracks illegal. This is outlaw music—*proibidão* [pro-EE-BEE-daow], or "totally forbidden"—and singing or playing it is a crime that carries a penalty of up to six months in jail.

Juca admits that he is breaking the law when he performs "24 Hours," since it urges the shooting of rival faction leaders. But since police rarely raid a *baile*, he's unlikely to be caught in the act of singing the song. The only way he'd really be at risk of arrest is if he records a "light" version. Most hit *proibidão* tracks are re-recorded with acceptable lyrics so they can be marketed on compilation CDs and played on the radio. Light versions are funded by above-board studios like Marlboro's. "That's the way to get caught," Juca insists. "The police will be able to trace me to the banned version. This happened to a friend of mine, and he is now in hiding upstate." For the time being Juca is happy just singing the illegal stuff.

★★★★★

NOT ALL RIO funk tracks are about violence; many are about sex. Out in Acari,



Clockwise from left: DJ Marlboro spins; Brazilian women enjoying "sensual funk" at Club 59; one of the most notorious *bailes*, Clube Emocoes; more than 1,000 people attend a *baile* at Morro Chapéu Manguiera.

IT MEANS HE LIKES THE SONG." MC JUCA

on the outskirts of Rio, Valeska, the bleached-blond lead singer of *Gaiola das Popozudas*—The Birdcage of Big-butted Babes—is teasing the crowd with their hit “*Se Marcar*”: “If you check me out, I’ll make out with you,” she sings, in one of the only printable lines in the band’s repertoire. Behind her, three girls in skintight outfits grind out a dance routine. Halfway through their 20-minute set, Valeska invites a member of the audience onstage. She and each of the dancers take turns rubbing their bodies against him. “Show us your butt,” she shouts, and he bends over. Suddenly, a dwarf dressed as Trinity from *The Matrix* and holding a giant inflatable penis jumps out of the crowd onto the stage.

Birdcage are one of a new genre of bawdy female groups who sing in a style called, euphemistically, “sensual funk.” Valeska is a charismatic MC, especially when the subject is adultery. “Who’d be a loyal wife? You clean his clothes, cook him food and stay at home while he’s out at the *baile*,” she shouts, to whoops of applause, before launching into a song about casual sex with married men. “You think your husband is yours,” runs the refrain. “Well, his body belongs to me.”

In fact, Valeska is a loyal wife. Her husband, Pardal, is the band’s manager and songwriter. The dwarf was his idea—“I found her at the circus”—as is the endlessly repeated theme of anal sex. “Brazilians are only interested in the butthole,” he asserts professorially. “They are not bothered about the pussy at all.”

Even though sensual funk isn’t illegal, its obscene lyrics make it unsuitable for radio airplay and distribution on official CDs. So—like the songs promoting the factions—the most popular sensual songs are re-recorded with sanitized lyrics. But everyone knows the real words. “To be big in funk these days, you need first of all to be big in the *favelas*,” says Pardal. “And the *favelas* prefer violence and smut.”

Juca and Paulinho’s “24 Hours” is one of the most successful *baile* funk songs of the year. But because it’s forbidden, you can’t buy a copy legally anywhere in Rio. To get one, you have to pay a visit to Rio’s *Camelodromo*, a chaotic bazaar in the downtown business district that sells everything from cheap clothes to car parts. At a stall selling pirate CDs, *Blender* asks the owner if he has any *proibidão*. He looks at us slightly longer than normal and then fetch-

es a small black plastic bag. He takes out an unmarked CD and, making sure that no one’s looking, slips it into a Discman. “It just came in today,” he says conspiratorially. “I’ve almost sold out. It’s what everyone wants.” The CD has 33 tracks; they are full of gun noises, violent threats and obscenities. One song, about the *favela* Arvore Seca, uses a Dire Straits sample from *Brothers in Arms*, mashed up over a heavy beat, with the lyrics “We’re just like Colombia ... the bullets will eat right through you.”

★★★★★

OVER THE PAST 12 months, DJs in the northern hemisphere have been drawn to *baile* funk’s punk energy and its rough patina of ghetto cool. Marlboro says that when Afrika Bambaataa came to Rio on tour last year, the hip-hop pioneer was so excited by the music that he told him, “This is the real funk.”

This international attention, however, belies the reality that funk has never been fully accepted by the Brazilian establishment. Even though the most listened-to radio program in Rio is DJ Marlboro’s funk show, major record companies almost never sign *baile* funk acts. The funk com- ➔

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munity says this is because they are unfairly discriminated against. In reality, it is because the majors doubt that young people in *favelas* would be able to afford \$10 for a CD—and because in the *favelas*, piracy is rife. Without money from record contracts, the main source of income for MCs and DJs comes from playing *bailes*. Even successful funk artists do not earn enough to leave the *favela*. Deise, whose track “Injeção” was one of the biggest hits of recent years, still works as a domestic maid.

It has recently become fashionable for middle-class Rio to be curious about the dangerous *favela* sound, and a few upmarket nightclubs have started to have weekly funk nights. Yet funk remains the music of the urban underclass, and *bailes* are demonized as hotbeds of crime and delinquency. “We suffer a lot of persecution,” says DJ Marlboro. “At one recent *baile*, the police came in and shut it down. They said, ‘You like funk. So you like shit—so eat shit.’” And then, Marlboro explains, the cops forced people to do just that. “My sound systems,” he says, “have bullet holes in them from police attacks.”

For Vera Malaguti, of the Rio Criminology Institute, fear of funk shows that Brazil still has the mindset of a slave society. “Mass youth movements are always criminalized by the white minority,” she says. “The U.S. had a revolution and then a black rights movement. We have never had either. For us it is an open wound.”

Malaguti sees nothing wrong in songs that promote violence: “They’re chronicles of daily life by people who live brutal lives.”



A FEW DAYS after *Blender* met Juca at the car wash, the Rio police launched an operation against the Red Command in Juca’s *favela*. During the raid, a police sniper mistook the 20-year-old goalkeeper of a local soccer team for a drug dealer and shot him dead. It’s the kind of thing that often happens in Rio’s shantytowns: In the ongoing civil war between the police and the drug factions, some 1,200 young people are killed every year.

But when, a few weeks later, we meet with Juca one last time, he says it shouldn’t be surprising that young people sing songs that glorify the drug gangs. Every *favela* dweller has witnessed scenes of horrific police violence, he says; the factions offer at least the illusion of security. “If a trafficker walks past my house, I know he won’t even look twice. But if the police come by, how do I know they won’t shoot me?”

There are other dangers too. Each drug faction has its own loyal roster of funk artists—only the female MCs and the most famous DJs are allowed access to all areas. When residents of Red Command *favelas*

LET'S **NOT** GO LATIN AMERICA!

CONSIDERING A RELAXING VACATION IN ONE OF THESE EXCITING DESTINATIONS? THINK AGAIN!

1 MEDELLÍN, COLOMBIA

ATTRactions: Enjoy a stroll through lush orchid plantations, watch gold being mined or marvel at Cathedral Metropolitana, the world’s largest brick building.

ON THE OTHER HAND: Colombia boasts the highest murder rate in Latin America and the country has the world’s highest kidnapping rate. Medellín is the most dangerous place in the Americas.

2 SÃO PAULO, BRAZIL

ATTRactions: “Rio is a beauty, but São Paulo is a city,” Marlene Dietrich once said. With fine cuisine, Brazilian music and dance music, late nights and good times are a way of life.

ON THE OTHER HAND: São Paulo had more murders per capita than rival deathtrap Rio last year, including 73 animals at the city zoo.

3 CARACAS, VENEZUELA

ATTRactions: An exciting, progressive city, Caracas boasts breathtaking modern skyscrapers, works by Picasso and Matisse and countryside of stunning beauty.

ON THE OTHER HAND: Travelers are advised to arrive during daylight to avoid being robbed upon leaving the airport. Venezuela is a politically volatile country, so demonstrations and bombings are widespread.



Colombian rebels: famously ugly.

4 MEXICO CITY, MEXICO

ATTRactions: The scale of this cosmopolitan megalopolis may be hard to take in. We recommend you tackle the center of ancient Aztec civilization one charming cantina at a time!

ON THE OTHER HAND: The Department of State proclaims the crime level “critical.” Cars are regularly stopped and raided for valuables, often by the local police.

5 GUATEMALA CITY, GUATEMALA

ATTRactions: Many fine museums showcase the country’s rich heritage, and the nearby Mayan ruins are not to be missed.

ON THE OTHER HAND: Inept law enforcement and massive corruption have led to what the United Nations terms “an uncontrollable spiral of violence.” The Mayan ruins are a popular location for beating sightseers. BEN MITCHELL

enter shantytowns under the control of rival gangs, they risk their lives. Enemies are called “Germans,” a slang term that originated from World War II movies. Juca says that the previous week, he left a *baile* in the

early hours of the morning, and the driver of his car took a wrong turn—and ended up in “German” territory. “If anyone had seen us, they would have shot first and asked questions later.”

Juca says that he and his brother have just written another song—commissioned by a local Red Command boss—called “The Return.” Juca says the song is designed to taunt the dealers in a rival *favela*. With resignation in his voice, he fears the song will prepare the ground for an actual armed incursion into rival territory, but he won’t feel responsible for provoking a battle that will undoubtedly claim more lives. “The war will happen anyway. My singing won’t change anything,” he says.

And since our last meeting, there’s been another development: Juca has changed his mind and decided to record a “light” version of “24 Hours.” He needs the cash—and the fame. He doesn’t see any other path to escape the poverty of the *favela*. “I’m putting myself at risk, but there is no other way,” he says. “The doorway to recognition is through funk.” [BLENDER]

*“Juca” and “Paulinho” are false names, to protect their identities.



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**116****BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN**

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**122****DEF LEPPARD**

Trash rock! A one-armed drummer! Ridiculous lyrics about sugar! Their greatest hits, reviewed.

★★★★☆

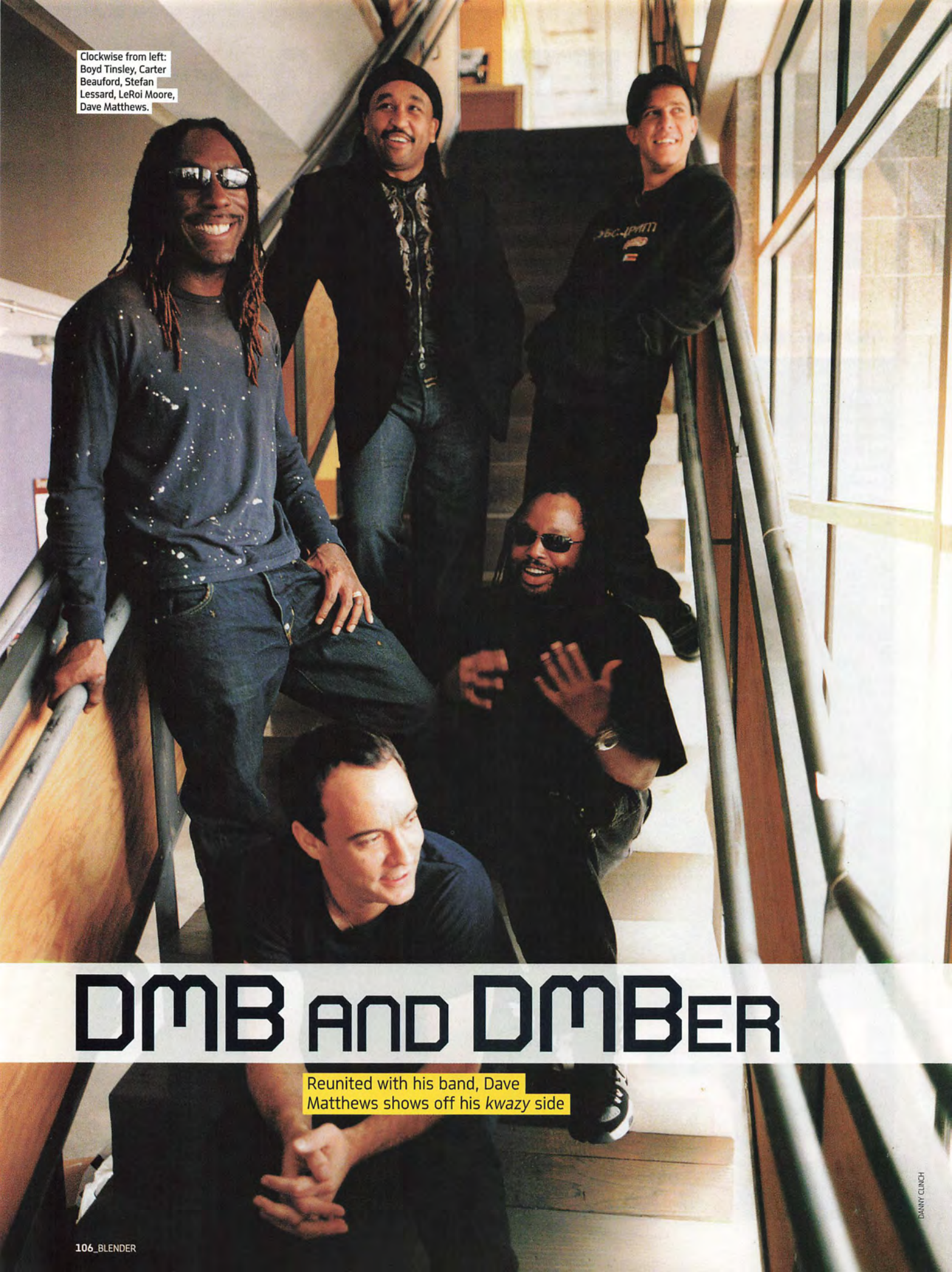
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ROCK'S NOBLEST SAMURAI BANG THEIR OWN DRUM ON A NEW TOUR

A group of five men are posed on a modern staircase with a glass railing. On the left, a man with long dreadlocks and sunglasses (Boyd Tinsley) stands with one foot on a lower step. Behind him, another man (Carter Beauford) stands on a higher step. To the right, a third man (Stefan Lessard) stands on the top step. In the center, a man with sunglasses and a goatee (LeRoi Moore) is crouching. In the foreground, a man (Dave Matthews) is sitting on the steps, looking towards the camera. The background shows a bright, modern interior with large windows.

Clockwise from left:
Boyd Tinsley, Carter
Beauford, Stefan
Lessard, LeRoi Moore,
Dave Matthews.

DMB AND DMBER

Reunited with his band, Dave
Matthews shows off his kwazy side

DAVE MATTHEWS BAND

STAND UP

☆☆☆

RCA

IS ANYBODY ELSE



Dave Matthews declare himself a nutcake? Locked in mortal combat with a perennially boring haircut, this 38-year-old husband, father of twins and

musical monogamist (he's worked with the same band for 14 years) wields the darkness in his soul like a weapon he just can't keep concealed.

In interviews, Matthews blurts about suicidal impulses; onstage he babbles in a nonlinear patois fans dub "Davespeak." And in his lyrics, so often quoted in yearbooks and bathroom stalls, he trips on a tightrope between despair and desire, unable to decide whether to dive off a ledge or beneath his lover's skirt.

Beyond the normal human mood swings, Matthews has a troubled history: being partly raised in apartheid-riven South Africa, his dad and then sister dying young, having to wait tables before getting so famous, all those fans bootlegging and that waste-dumping problem in Chicago last year. But maybe the real reason he puts on the crazy clothes is because they suit the music he hears in his head and translates into unlikely hit records.

Listen beneath the groove that makes his music seem like mainstream roots-rock and you'll hear a ragtag reconfiguration of American music's essential elements, from immigrant beats to swinging Western fiddle runs. It's an unresolved sound, a perfect setting for emotions that can't quite be contained or even defined. Playing with this musical setting brings out the shaky side of an ordinary guy.

This sixth outing by the Dave Matthews Band (their first since 2003's solo Matthews effort, *Some Devil*) contains more than a few troubling tales—"Smooth Rider" is a stalker's ode, "Louisiana Bayou" tells a murky story of gothic intrigue, "Hello Again" is a murder ballad and the first single, "American Baby," goes into battle with a recruit (probably a soldier in Iraq, given Matthews' well-publicized anti-Bush stance, though it's never stated) who pines for home.

But its most important narrative doesn't come in words: It's the relationship between DMB's five nimble instrumentalists, who take Putumayo globalism to a Sigma Chi frat party. This musical plotline reveals itself immediately, with the introduction to the tranquil ballad "Dream-

girl"—Matthews' voice multiplied into a fanfare that sounds like a township choir.

Such African elements are emphasized throughout. Matthews' delicate guitar lays the groundwork for the elaborate pattern-work of violinist Boyd Tinsley and bassist Stefan Lessard. Sax player LeRoi Moore brings the boat to America, showing a connection between Africa, funk and jazz. And drummer Carter Beauford moves with almost untraceable agility, riding a rock backbeat here and a polyrhythm there, driving home the main point: In a multicultural world, the old idea of rock fusion (jazz-rock, country-rock, etc.) gives way to a more intricate and playful dance.

Producer Mark Batson, who is currently hot as a hitmaker with Gwen Stefani, Eminem and Beyoncé, has a lot to do with the complexity. The portion of his résumé that's relevant here is the lesser-known collaborations with great, under-the-radar New York artists like Arto Lindsay. Batson is a true master of understated enhancement, whether it's the way hip-hop handclaps are mingled with Beauford's island-style percussion on the summery "Old Dirt Hill" or the compressed vocals on the

Sting-alicious spiritual protest song "Everybody Wake Up."

The DMB member with the biggest challenge here is, strangely, Matthews. His stream-of-consciousness lyrics always fit the group's improvisatory ethic, but Batson's meticulousness forces Matthews to think more like a storyteller, less like a charming babbler. He still relies heavily on clichés—the ballad "Steady As We Go" is so full of them it's guaranteed to become a

wedding-reception favorite—but he adds such humble conviction they're forgivable. He also has a very dirty mind, which for

the most part is a good thing; nothing battles platitudes like an earthy detail about sweat running down a lover's spine.

Best are the moments when Matthews relaxes, playing with his itchy baritone as he fingers another easy guitar line and his band follows along. Does the pop world need another isolated oddball? Not so much. But this Dave Matthews, the one wearing team colors in a globetrotting amazing race, is one worth rooting for.

ANN POWERS

DOWNLOAD: "Stand Up," "Old Dirt Hill"

THEY TAKE PUTUMAYO GLOBALISM TO A SIGMA CHI FRAT PARTY.

TALES FROM THE STUDIO

A VERY CONTENT DAVE MATTHEWS LOOKS BACK ON THE MAKING OF *STAND UP*

"VIOLINS ROCK!"

WHERE THE MAGIC HAPPENED: "Haunted Hollow—it's this house in the Virginia woods we renovated."

ON A SCALE OF ONE TO 10, *STAND UP*'S DEGREE OF DIFFICULTY:

"One. It wasn't hard at all; there wasn't one single day that felt like work."

STUDIO HIJINKS: "Occasionally we set off some fireworks. I don't know what kind they were, but big is the key. More and bigger, things that go higher and explode. Bright and loud."

THE MONEY SPENT RECORDING THIS ALBUM COULD BUY:

"A really, really big hamburger: We didn't spend that much at all."

TORTURED METAPHOR TO DESCRIBE THE ALBUM:

"The whole process was like an overburdened fruit tree—

the hardest part was figuring out which songs we were willing to throw away."

THE ALBUM IS A CROSS BETWEEN _____ AND _____:

"A big, technological beehemoth ... and an old guy playing on his porch."

MOTHER'S LITTLE HELPERS:

"I'm not taking the bait on that one, but I can tell you, in that environment, whatever

moves you is welcome. [Very long pause] I definitely need coffee. Coffee and wine."

THE HATERS WILL SAY:

"The criticism is always that the new record isn't the same as all the others. I don't mind—but this one will get to you. And two years down the road, they'll be happily eating their words with cream and sugar."

WHY THIS RECORD IS WORTH BUYING:

"There isn't anything like it. I don't mean the album's whacked—it's not Radiohead—but it's a good record full of love and sex. If you have to return this one to the store, it's not my problem, it's yours."

STEVE KANDELL



What Jerry Garcia saw all the time.

THE SCORE

★★★★★

A CLASSIC

★★★★

GREAT

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GOOD

★★

MEDIOCRE

★

FOUL

ABERFELDY

YOUNG FOREVER ★★★★★

ROUGH TRADE

Five agreeable lads and lassies make a short, un-Scottishly sunny debut

What is the sound of two lions fornicating? Surely not Aberfeldy, five of the shiniest, happiest people ever to find themselves on the wrong side of an RIAA warning label. Despite its

cover art of beasts making love, *Young Forever* is anything but racy. From his first gush ("I love everyone/Everybody underneath the sun," on "A Friend Like You"), leader Riley Briggs waxes Polyphonic about getting high, falling in love and reeling over surly girls. The warmly homegrown quintet, named for a village north of its Edinburgh base, plays cheerfully—it's more kitchen pop than chamber pop—on goofy, music-class instruments: No fewer than three Aberfeldies play glockenspiel. Of course, "glocks" figure prominently on most hip-hop albums too. Maybe Aberfeldy earned that warning label after all.

TODD PRUZAN

DOWNLOAD: "Heliopolis By Night," "Something I Must Tell You"

ANNIE

ANNIEMAL ★★★★★

BIG BEAT/ATLANTIC

A Kylie Minogue hipsters don't have to feel guilty about liking

First-name-only is a distinction reserved for only the most charismatic of popstresses. On this boisterous debut, Norway's Annie earns



Annie: "Don't wash leather in hot water, kids!"

the right, masterfully fusing synth-pop rhythms with her own feline coos: "I don't want to settle down, I just want to chew gum," she teases on the slippery, girls-just-wanna-have-fun anthem "Chewing Gum." Annie has her disco influences down: "No Easy Love" skitters like Chic, and "Anniemal" mainlines the ominous throb of Giorgio Moroder. Elsewhere, the paranoid tiptoe of "Always Too Late" reminds us that

pretty voices can still be unnerving. Better yet are the quacks and hand-claps of "The Greatest Hit," which borrows its loop—and attitude—from another star with no last name: Madonna.

HUA HSU

DOWNLOAD: "Chewing Gum," "Heart-beat," "The Greatest Hit"

CARIBOU

THE MILK OF HUMAN KINDNESS ★★★★★

DOMINO/LEAF

Playful rocktronica from a Canadian knob-twiddler with a Ph.D. in math

Dan Snaith, a.k.a. Caribou, is a laptop dweeb who's a drone-rocker at heart. His sample-heavy records are meditative and rich in texture, stitched together with digital seams. But this third album (the first since shedding his Manitoba moniker) finds him pastiching bands who were steering a single chord and rhythm to Blissout City long before iMacs—most notably Neu!'s signature "motorik" beat and Silver Apples' wobbling circuit-throb and marching-band drum frenzy. Caribou's recent live shows have

HOT LEGS

Former B-list R&B sweetheart gets a sexual wake-up call

AMERIE

TOUCH ★★★★★

SONY URBAN/COLUMBIA

WHEN AMERIE'S "WHY Don't We Fall in Love" hit charts three years ago, there was no reason to suspect the arrival of a new R&B superdiva. Her voice was graceful but, like the rest of her debut, it was a dutiful rehash of Brandy-esque virginal soul. It sounded like a promising demo: nice exposition, not a lot of individuality.

Since then, two things have happened: Rich Harrison, her producer and guru, became a hip-hop soul mastermind (thank him for Beyoncé's "Crazy in Love" and the J. Lo-proof J. Lo hit "Get Right"), and Amerie found her G-spot. The lead single, "1 Thing," is a go-all-night, hair-flying-in-her-face cry of passion. Over a clobbering drum break, Amerie catalogues some scintillating details of a mad flirtation: car keys jingling, high heels clicking.

The title track, on which producer Lil Jon augments his usual synth foghorns with an

erotic tabla rumble, captures Amerie's mission statement: "I know you think I'm a good girl," she sings in a voice modeled on a satin sheet. "Don't you think a girl like me should be touched?" The sexual-awakening theme is not a new one, but—thank God—it never gets old. And Amerie's heat is irresistible, in large part because it's subtle, several pairs of assless chaps shy of an all-out Xtina makeover. "Come With Me" demonstrates Amerie's coyness: Over a big but spare beat, she calls to a man who has just been dumped, slowly reeling him in: "It won't be the same if you come with me," she coos. Behind her, a choir of Ameries spreads out in a dozen directions.

The down-tempo filler that takes up about a fourth of the album ("Rolling Down My Face," "All I Need," which sound like castoffs from Mary J. Blige, a previous Harrison client) is tolerable downtime; when she's in the mood again, all else disappears.

BEN SISARIO

DOWNLOAD: "1 Thing," "Touch," "Talkin' About"

AMERIE'S HEAT IS
IRRESISTIBLE.





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Hal's "love palace" left something to be desired.



Electrelane are in their 20s. Their 1920s!



Gorillaz, moments before mugging SpongeBob.

featured a mask-wearing three-piece band, and the sounds Snaithe tweaks and layers here are lifted as much from actual, hand-played instruments as from cutting-edge software; a few tracks even have timid vocals. Too bad most of his songs come to an end just as they're heating up.

DOUGLAS WOLK

DOWNLOAD: "Yeti," "Bees"

JAH CURE

FREEDOM BLUES ★★★

VP

Of Jah and jail: spiritual reggae songs, courtesy of a Jamaican inmate

Jah Cure could be Jamaica's Mumia Abu-Jamal, or reggae's Shyne. The 26-year-old Rastafarian delivers roots reggae from a Kingston prison, where he's serving a 15-year sentence for a rape that he—along with his legion of fans—insists he didn't commit. Like jailed rapper Shyne, Jah Cure could have milked his prison cell for PR. Refreshingly, he doesn't. His third album bears no intimations of incarceration; it eschews bitter bemoaning in favor of Jah-inspired optimism. Jah Cure's rich voice—perpetually strained, as if grasping for that elusive next note—makes trite Rasta hymns sound poignant and fresh. At his best ("Hi Hi," "Jah Bless Me"), he makes us feel his lust for freedom—in the spiritual sense, yes, but also the literal one.

BAZ DREISINGER

DOWNLOAD: "Jah Bless Me," "King in the Jungle," "Hi Hi"

ELECTRELANE

AXES ★★★

TOO PURE

Third album from the best drone rock band ever inspired by choo-choos

This Brighton, U.K., quartet's favorite sound is a train accelerating. Almost every track here gradually ramps up to a racing one- or two-chord pulse, spitting out elec-

trical sparks under its wheels—"Gone Darker" features actual train sounds alongside frontwoman Verity Susman's free-form saxophone. Apart from the groove, everything here is decoration, including the words that Susman very occasionally sings, almost under her breath, intermittent flurries of two-fisted piano and nails-on-blackboard violin. The band sometimes flails ineffectually, but more often it stays streamlined and urgent—as on "Those Pockets Are People," a song in which Electrelane work up enough steam to segue into "The Partisan," a cover of Leonard Cohen's bitter reverie about political violence that churns and chugs with fury.

DOUGLAS WOLK

DOWNLOAD: "Bells," "The Partisan"

FOUR TET

EVERYTHING ECSTATIC ★★★

DOMINO

Fourth studio album from a Brit wiz who brings electronica into the bedroom

His primary instrument might be the computer, but Kieran Hebden, who records as Four Tet, has a turntablist's taste for anarchy. Throughout this agitated instrumental exploration, he cuts and slices like a hip-hop DJ, juicing unexceptional drum loops with helicoptering beat-chops

and out-of-tempo digital hiccups. It's a radical departure from the languid "folktronic" atmospheres of Hebden's still-amazing 2003 *Rounds*, closer to the early freeform jazz-fusion of Weather Report (or to German prog-rockers Can). This dense noise assault may not sustain the feeling of ecstasy from beginning to end, but its percolating trance rhythms ("Sun Drums and Soil," one of several pieces featuring vibraphone) and captivating space experiments ("And Then Patterns") connect on a visceral level that's rare in the cerebral world of electronic music.

TOM MOON

DOWNLOAD: "Clouding," "High Fives," "Sleep, Eat Food, Have Visions"

ROBBIE FULKS

GEORGIA HARD ★★

YEP ROC

Nashville-bashing alt-country smartass sings about the rain, the road and losers

Chicago singer and guitarist Robbie Fulks might have been as major a star as Big & Rich. But when, in the '90s, his quirky wit proved too brash for Nashville, he penned the kiss-off "Fuck This Town" and headed north. Call it off-off-Opry. A blazing guitarist, Fulks packs clubs, but his recordings suffer from his bland, pushy voice. Here, backed by some great mandolin and banjo players, he flips the CMT crowd another bird with the imposter-outing "Country Than Thou." Too bad his weak singing dims otherwise clever hooks like "There's always a way out where there's a road" and "Goodbye, cruel girl." And the sad gambol of "Georgia Hard" and easy calypso "I Never Did Like Planes" make you wish the alt-country gods would send Fulks his own Gretchen Wilson.

LAURA SINAGRA

DOWNLOAD: "Georgia Hard," "Where There's a Road"

GORILLAZ

DEMON DAYS ★★★

VIRGIN

An album made by animated apes featuring ... Dennis Hopper?

The brainchild of Blur's Damon Albarn and comic book artist Jamie Hewlett, these four fictional simians give "cartoonish hip-hop" a whole new meaning. Their second LP—helmed by Albarn and Dangermouse, the guerilla auteur behind last year's Jay-Z/Beatles mashup—is darker and colder than its predecessor but, surprisingly, more fun. The best tracks are the most ridiculous, like the wild-eyed De La Soul collaboration "Feel Good Inc.," or "Fire Coming out of a Monkey's Head," a spoken-word fable featuring professional lunatic Dennis Hopper that's even more absurd than it sounds. British MC Roots Manuva ends his verse on "All Alone" by shouting, "Turn up the 'Oh God!'" as if wowing listeners were as easy as twisting a knob—and for these guys, it often is.

JOSH EELLS

DOWNLOAD: "All Alone," "Feel Good Inc."

HAL

HAL ★★

ROUGH TRADE

Irish newcomers wish they all could be California boys

Like their countrymen the Thrills, Hal must wake up every day cursing fate that they were born in Ireland rather than America. In their heads, it's 1972, the sunroof is down and they're cruising Big Sur Highway, singing along to AM radio. At every lushly crafted turn, their influences are signposted a mile high—some sun-dappled, Byrds-y Rickenbacker here, some doleful country-rock slide guitar there, harmonies that make them sound as if they're auditioning for Brian Wilson's backing band—but instead of sunshine-pop sugar, there's the cloying tang of saccharine. Even though "Play the →

I LOVE THIS CD!



ERIKA CHRISTENSEN
ACTRESS, TRAFFIC,
THE UPSIDE OF ANGER



JACK JOHNSON
BRUSHFIRE FAIRY TALES
ENJOY / UNIVERSAL

"It's soothing but in no way boring. I've listened to it so many times, there's a familiarity, like an old friend."

Hits" has enough youthful zip to give idol worship a good name, Hal's debut says everything about their record collections while revealing nothing about their lives.

DORIAN LYNKEY

DOWNLOAD: "Play the Hits"

HIP HOP HOODIOS

AGUA PA' LA GENTE ☆☆☆

JAZZHEADS

A bicoastal rap duo so Jewish they make the Beasties look like Mormons

This Latino-Jewish rap duo's stew of klezmer, pop-hop and *rock en español* is meatier than its gimmicky aroma would suggest. Authors of the first bilingual rap about the

Inquisition—"1492," a smoky salsa number—vocalist Josué Norek and instrumentalist Abraham Veléz unite their influences (and guests from Santana and Jaguares) under their own playful ethnopolitical identities. Norek sets a frenetic, sometimes startling pace, calling himself "kike" one moment and bragging about his SAT scores the next. This is matched by the inborn exuberance of the band's musical mélange: The title cut combines lithe Latin dance and the sharp hooks of radio rock with elastic Spanish rhymes and decent, Dr. Dre–baiting jokes. Finally, a rap group whose only beef is with pork.

NICK CATUCCI

DOWNLOAD: "Agua Pa' la Gente," "1492"

MIKE JONES

WHO IS MIKE JONES? ☆☆

SWISHA HOUSE/ASYLUM/WARNER BROS.

Call this Texas MC at 281-330-8004 and ask him to make a better album next time

Fans of Houston's sludgy, slow-moving screw music scene were going ape over this mix-tape phenom long before talk of this major-label debut. A fanatical self-promoter who broke big personalizing songs for strippers, obsessively



Mike Jones: Laziest hitchhiker. Ever.

name-checks himself and volunteers his cell digits to fans, Jones raps in a slurpy drawl about southern hip-hop topics like wood-grain steering wheels and "purple" (soda laced with codeine syrup). While "Screw Dat" and lead single "Still Tippin'" percolate with quirky energy, songs like "Flossin'" feature low-ambition beats too chintzy to ignore. Plus, Jones's brain-dead gender politics—love grandma, hate ho's—is straight out of the Crunk-Magnon era. Marketing-wise, he's brilliant; musically, he's a bore.

JASON KING

DOWNLOAD: "Still Tippin'"

SHELBY LYNNE

SUIT YOURSELF ☆☆☆☆

CAPITOL

Alabama-raised spitfire, an old pro at 36, regains her edge

The lone constant in Shelby Lynne's career is her bloody-mindedness. She went from failure in the Nashville country factory to a brilliant, cranky singer-songwriter album (*I Am Shelby Lynne*) so admired it won her a 2000 Grammy. Then she made a glutinously bad, non-eccentric pop-anthem record, apparently because she felt like it.

I LOVE THIS CD!



TONY HAWK
PROFESSIONAL SKATEBOARDER

BECK GUERO
INTERSCOPE

"I like how eclectic he is. I liked it when he went sad and folky, but was happy to hear him return to quirky and fun."

MALKMUS: ROGER KISBY; LYNNE: JIM MARSHALL

Now she's scaled back again: *Suit Yourself*—the best thing she's done since winning the Grammy—has some homemade demo tracks, plus chatter and false starts. Lynne, as producer, mixes the calculated imperfections with the smooth refinements of her songwriting and band. She has an accurate, soulful voice, and swings unpredictably between murmuring and belting; "Suit Yourself" mixes Dusty Springfield soul, catchy '70s AM radio and a blunt, sexy, unsentimental vision of pop-country.

BEN RATLIFF

DOWNLOAD: "Go With It," "Where Am I Now," "Rainy Night in Georgia"

STEPHEN MALKMUS

FACE THE TRUTH ☆☆☆

MATADOR

Former indie it-boy is either fighting an imaginary villain or going bonkers

Five years after disbanding the premiere cult band of the '90s, Pavement's ex leader is, apparently, hunkered down in an Oregon basement, poking at Moog synthesizers, jamming on tangos and, according to the opening song, battling a villain in his head named Leather McWhip who is giving him shocks.

Stephen Malkmus:
Likes: detuned guitars, fractured wordplay. Hates: lawnmowers.



Hmm. But while one might justly fear the alpha-hipster has gone a bit too far off the grid—into late Brian Wilson territory—the finer of these 11 songs say otherwise, blending limpid Velvet Underground textures, strolling country-rock and wry, cryptically plaintive Malkmus poetry well enough to sound like neo-classics destined for a Wes Anderson film. As one song toasts, "You're the maker of modern minor masterpieces for the untrained eye"—a fair description of this rock master.

CHRIS NORRIS

DOWNLOAD: "Freeze the Saints," "Post-Paint Boy," "Loud Cloud Crowd"

AIMEE MANN

THE FORGOTTEN ARM ☆☆

SUPEREGO

L.A.'s queen of gentle glumness is stuck in a well-crafted rut

The buzz on Aimee Mann's fifth solo record is that it heads out in a fresh direction. It's about a couple that meet at a state fair in the 1970s, she has told reporters; it's influenced by her newfound interest in boxing, she has also said. But put it on and you'll hear how much it's of a piece with her past. "Baby, baby, why do I feel so bad?" she sings on

Lynne: "Wanna hear 'Smoke on the Water'?"



"Video." The answer's easy: Because you're making an Aimee Mann CD. *The Forgotten Arm* is full of heart-breaking songs fixated on hard-luck tales. *Lost in Space*, from 2002, was full of references to addiction, and so is this: "Clean Up for Christmas" spells it out pretty clearly. A talented songwriter, she's gotten her share of credit for bucking the major-label system and striking out with her own label, but if she doesn't follow commercial formulas, she's following creative ones, and selling herself short in the process.

RJ SMITH

DOWNLOAD: "King of the Jailhouse" →

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Chris Martin quells his "punch photographer" reflex.

BIG DADDY

Mr. Paltrow mixes thoughtful neuroses with epic lite-rock riffs

COLDPLAY

X & Y ★★★★★

CAPITOL

ONLY SIX YEARS ago, wiseacres dismissed Coldplay as Radiohead Lite; all the melancholy atmosphere, none of the innovation or daring or weirdness. The skeptics disdained singer Chris Martin's lyrics—shy and goofy, like love notes passed in class—as well as his gangling demeanor, so un-rock-starish that he made The Boy Next Door look like David Lee Roth.

The knee-weakening crescendos of *Parachutes* and *A Rush of Blood to the Head* made a superstar of Martin, which now only multi-

plies his sense of feeling torn by attention. On *X&Y* he's bamboozled by celebrity attention—bemoaning "all this space I'm taking up" in "White Shadows," a glassy, urgent pop song—but he also edges into Bono's rock-prophet territory on the glowering "Twisted Logic," riding Gothic guitars while urging listeners not to "fight for the wrong side." Tabloid writers and unfair traders will probably not load the song on their iPods.

His dilemma is paired with a subtle sonic upgrade: The serene guitars and limpid drums that make Coldplay the musical equivalent of a hot tub here take a blast of cold water, showing a greater debt to chilly rock

soundscapers of the '80s, from Simple Minds to New Order. The melodies, meanwhile, are the most immediately captivating they've written, delivering no shortage of spine-tingling stadium-rock moments, from a relentless Classic Coldplay™ piano riff in "Speed of Sound" to an unexpected burst of super-sized psychedelia in "Low."

At the same time, Martin continues to explore his constant theme: "I fucked up, and I'm sorry." It's the focus of "Fix You," a picture of broken-down love framed by churchy organ. Maybe it's a trick of his clogged, eccentric voice—an

accident of British dentistry—but when he sings "When you love

someone and it goes to waste, could it be worse?" he sounds sincere. No wonder Gwyneth went ga-ga for the guy. *X&Y* will make some rock fans fall apart and blubber into their hankies. Others will gag and shout "Sissy!" Chris Martin, weaned on the principles of indie rock but with mountainous goals in mind, should pay no heed. His band have made their masterpiece.

TONY POWER

DOWNLOAD: "Speed of Sound," "Low," "What If?"

CHRIS MARTIN'S CURRENT LISTENING

KRAFTWERK
THE MAN-MACHINE/CAPITOL

BLOC PARTY
SILENT ALARM/VICE

MARTIN EDGES INTO ROCK PROPHET TERRITORY.

THE GUIDE NEW RELEASES

MERCURY REV

THE SECRET MIGRATION

★★★

V2

Reformed space cadets settle down in their comfort zone

Emerging from the pupa of amp-blitzing psychedelia and mental instability (their former singer once tried to gouge out the guitarist's eye with a spoon), Mercury Rev achieved a butterfly-like rebirth on the eerie fairy-tale Americana of 1998's *Deserter's Songs*. Those new frontiers are now familiar territory, even if the peaks on their sixth album remind you what wonderful territory that can be: On "Across Y'er Ocean," their ornate, acid-trip Disney soundtrack and Jonathan Donahue's awestruck tremor wrap

around a rapturous pop hook. Without the far-flung idiosyncrasy of old, the magic wears thin. Not that anyone wants to see an eye-gouging revival, but *The Secret Migration* comes dangerously close to being just another Mercury Rev album, and they're too inspired for such a mundane fate.

DORIAN LYNKEY

DOWNLOAD: "Across Y'er Ocean," "Vermillion"

MESHUGGAH

CATCH THIRTY THREE

★★★★

NUCLEAR BLAST

Fifth album from hirsute Swedes offsets brawn with beauty

Despite a name that sounds more Mel Brooks than metal (it's the Yiddish word for "crazy"), these grindcore heroes couldn't be any more serious. Their punishing songs crunch and crash like construction sites, and their favorite theme is "the ceaseless fever of spite." The quartet lives just a dried fish's throw from Norway, world capital of baroque, absurdly melodramatic black metal. So here the band take a tip from that scene. *Catch Thirty Three* augments their oppressive, precision-gear roar—which often evokes Tom Morello locked inside a windowless rehearsal room—with shades of lonely six-string tone poetry a hair away from the choral vocals and eyeshadow favored by Norway's moodiest. Less brainy metalheads might fear the testosterone-depleting effects of this subtler expression of rage; Meshuggah are able to recognize the value of contrast.

MIKAEL WOOD

DOWNLOAD: "Mind's Mirrors," "Dehumanization"

OASIS

DON'T BELIEVE THE TRUTH

★★★

EPIC

On their sixth studio album, the onetime kings of British rock start showing their age

What happens when a retro band gets old enough to be retro itself? In the mid-'90s, Oasis sneered their way to superstardom by ripping off the Beatles and, uh, the Beatles, strutting and posing as if they were legends, too, and refusing to apologize for any of it. Eleven years later, the formula's the same. *Truth* can't touch the Manchester quartet's lion-hearted early work—first single "Lyla" only lumbers, and songwriter

Noel Gallagher has even

less to say than he used to. Still, "Guess God Thinks I'm Abel" sports singer bro Liam's most memorable melody yet, while "The Importance of Being Idle" is the

kind of jaunty B-side they used to nail in the time it took to down a pint of Carling.

JOSH EELLS

DOWNLOAD: "The Importance of Being Idle," "Guess God Thinks I'm Abel"

ONEIDA

THE WEDDING

JAGJAGUWAR

Brooklyn noise-rockers make music for maidens faire

Finally, an album that bridges the gaping chasm between hipsters and ... Renaissance Faires. It sounds odd on paper—and odd on a stereo too—but the result is weirdly beautiful: While Hanoi Jane sings cryptically about mythical German beasts, crushing flower petals into wine and generally spending too much time in forests, his band create hypnotic grooves with an array of unexpected sounds. "The Eiger" features an upbeat string quintet, the intricately finger-picked guitar on "Run Through My Hair" suggests three music boxes running backwards at once and "High Life" is a sunny

I LOVE THIS CD!

JADA PINKETT SMITH
ACTRESS, COLLATERAL, THE MATRIX

WILL SMITH
LOST AND FOUND
INTERSCOPE

"He's hotter than ever. He just has such a good time when he's making music, and it's reflected in the sound."

confection of computer bleeps. Along the way there are detours into stoner rock and '60s psychedelic wreckage—shaking off the pixie dust and getting dusted.

JONAH WEINER

DOWNLOAD: "Lavender," "Know," "Run Through My Hair"

ROBERT PLANT AND THE STRANGE SENSATION

MIGHTY REARRANGER ★★★

SANCTUARY

Led Zeppelin frontman's long solo career still kicking



You might think that Robert Plant, at 56, now needs an escalator to heaven. Turns out his first solo disc

of original material in 12 years (following 2002's extraordinary covers album) effortlessly surges into the stratosphere of his better work—when not slipping into new age-y monotony. His voice has aged well, retaining the supple flexibility tested by Zep's scale-busting fire-works. Earlier flirtations with world music have largely given way to studio rock with electronic flourishes and his old favorite, baroque folk. Plant's lyrics remain, as ever, biblically grandiose. He references magical spells (the bluesy, African-rhythmed "Somebody Knocking"), a search for knowledge (bleepy big-



Mercury Rev
love re-enacting
The Matrix.

rockers "Tin Pan Valley") and the "father, son and holy ghost" (noisy, funk-beated "Freedom Fries"). Forget Middle Earth—Plant's quest, remarkably, has survived middle age.

NICK CATUCCI

DOWNLOAD: "Somebody Knocking," "Let the Four Winds Blow"

THE RAVEONETTES

PRETTY IN BLACK ★★★

COLUMBIA

Great Dane duo get darkly romantic

On their second full-length album, the Raveonettes revisit a fantasized 1950s where a leather-clad Buddy Holly played his Strato- →

THE CD WE'RE TOTALLY GAY FOR!

COMMON

BE ★★★

G.O.O.D. MUSIC/GEFFEN

Chicago's best rapper teams up with its best producer

Kanye West may have a Jesus complex, but it's Common who's resurrected here. From his beginnings as a conscious MC to his nadir as Erykah Badu's hippie-fied lovetoy (see 2002's *Electric Circus*—though under no circumstances listen to it), Common, despite ferocious talent, has existed on the fringes of mainstream hip-hop. But Kanye's "backpacker with a Benz" aesthetic triumphed in 2004 and now he's bringing it back home, providing Common with nine of these 11 beats, giving the also-ran one of the albums of the year. Be picks up where West's *The College Dropout* left off—soulful samples, joyful horns, whipcrack

snarls—and as the charismatic storytelling tackles weighty subjects like faith, love and commitment, Kanye keeps things musically light, and Common sounds energized and happy (maybe he got the "friend's discount" on these expensive beats). On "They Say," he strives to "make righteous bitches get low," and on the breezy "Go," he and Kanye even make guest John Mayer sound funky. Now that's talent.

ANDY GREENWALD

DOWNLOAD: "Go," "Testify"



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crushes
irritating bird.

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Trent Reznor confronts demons, disturbing likeness to Jason Schwartzman.

STILL HURTS

An Animal Fuckers gets back to basics: pain, static and pop

NINE INCH NAILS

WITH TEETH ★★★★★

INTERSCOPE

REALLY SPICY FOOD at a good restaurant hits your buds from all over; it isn't just an overdose of hot peppers. The same holds with Trent Reznor's noise pop. Flare the volume and you'll find more to savor; cartoon industrial effects reverberate as fleshed-out orchestration, with gentler parts inserted for contrast and flow. Even better, as Johnny Cash's death-letter cover of "Hurt" showed, Reznor is a double threat who grounds muso composition in sturdy pop structures and broadly shared sentiments, however dark. Too bad he's also one of the prototypical disappointing '90s rockers: taking too long between albums, worrying needlessly about his cred, tying himself up in knots no one else even realizes are there.

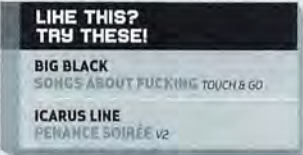
The fourth Nine Inch Nails studio full-length in the band's 16 years discards the electronica-damaged symphonic tripe of 1999's *The Fragile* for an hour's worth of the good stuff: churning, yearning synth-rock. By the second track, with the drums machine-gunning inhumanly and Reznor screaming "Don't you fucking know what you are?" over a plunging bass

note, it's clear that ol' blood-in-his-eyes is back. This isn't a sustained achievement to match 1994's *The Downward Spiral* (where even the stray tracks had reptilian majesty), just a veteran's delighted resubmergence in the fusion of the industrial and the confessional he created with the earlier *Pretty Hate Machine* album and *Broken EP*.

It isn't clear how NIN's original audience will hear *With Teeth*: Dance to "The Hand That Feeds" with their toddlers? Blast "Every Day Is Exactly the Same" at the office? Well, yes, hopefully. No less than country or classic rock, angsty techno-pop turns out to be a perfectly good soundtrack for confronting middle age, as Reznor shows in the aches-and-painful grumbles of the I'm-starting-to-fade-away pairing of "Only" and "Getting Smaller." He'll never stop being a therapy case, and he'll never lose his gift for making the recording studio an exquisite torture chamber.

ERIC WEISBARD

DOWNLOAD: "You Know Who You Are?," "Only," "Every Day Is Exactly the Same"



caster with a switchblade. But this time the Danish duo forgo the feed-back and employ a hipster's dream team of collaborators: Velvet Underground drummer Moe Tucker, Suicide's synthesizer-strangler Martin Rev and the former Mrs. Wall of Sound, Ronnie Spector. The result is a surprisingly heartfelt collection, heavy on lullaby-like ballads yet still oozing with sexy noir ambience. Band mastermind Sune Rose Wagner channels an amorous Elvis Presley for "The Heavens," while icy blonde siren Sharin Foo trades ooohs with Spector on the panoramic "Ode to L.A." Despite the fond eye toward the past, only an ill-advised cover of "My Boyfriend's Back," a girl-group original, sounds anachronistic.

ROSS RAIHALA

DOWNLOAD: "Seductress of Bums," "Uncertain Times," "Red Tan"

JOHNATHAN RICE

TROUBLE IS REAL ★★★★★

REPRISE

Conor Oberst just found himself a new support act

Born in Virginia, raised in Scotland and now settled in New York, Johnathan Rice is a singer-songwriter who, though just 21, sounds as if he carries much of the world's weight on his slender shoulders. This hardly sets him apart—countless young male musicians seem to be plucking out sad acoustic laments these days—but his debut album is an enveloping, intimate portrait. With a vocal style that sounds as if he is whispering directly into your ear, he's reminiscent of John Mayer at his most tentative on "Lady Memphis," while "Stay at Home" is an exquisite sad-sack waltz, like Charlie Brown gone folk.

NICK DUERDEN

DOWNLOAD: "Lady Memphis," "Stay at Home"

SLEATER-KINNEY

THE WOODS ★★★★★

SUB POP

Activist punks learn to jam, come on like the feminist Led Zeppelin

Sleater-Kinney are Pacific Northwest punks, activists and feminist role models, but on their seventh album they rock out like groupie-shagging, drug-snorting golden gods. Corin Tucker's trademark four-alarm wail joins co-singer Carrie Brownstein's bratty bleat in railing against contemporary evils like reality television ("Entertain") and political closed-mindedness ("Wilderness"), as both churn out thick, muddy guitar riffs that seem to have been fermenting since the early '70s. Drummer Janet Weiss

steamrolls through the feedback caked on by Flaming Lips producer Dave Fridmann; when she crashes the harmonica-inflected sweetness of "Modern Girl," you can hear John Bonham air-drumming in his grave. *The Woods* peaks with the closing suite of "Let's Call It Love" and "Night Light," two lusty blues-metal songs linked by six minutes of epic jamming. Valhalla, they are coming!

AMY PHILLIPS

DOWNLOAD: "The Fox," "Modern Girl," "Let's Call It Love"

WILL SMITH

LOST AND FOUND ★★

INTERSCOPE

America's favorite alien-slayer trades his million-dollar grin for a scowl



A goofy charmer with rhymes as clean as his rap sheet, Will Smith is the kind of MC desperate housewives can get jiggy with. The flipside is a serious lack of street cred—hip-hop fans like their rappers trading gunshots, not trading jokes with Jay Leno. Here, Smith tries to toughen up. On "Mr. Niceguy," he lashes out Eminem-style at everyone from haters who question his blackness to a radio DJ who called him gay. (No mention of the agent who talked him into *Wild Wild West*.) It's ultimately unconvincing; he could've used more of the fun-loving Big Willie style that pops up on the rowdy single "Switch." "Truth be told, this ain't my style," Smith rhymes. Too right.

JOSH EELLS

DOWNLOAD: "Switch"

SMOG

A RIVER AIN'T TOO MUCH TO LOVE ★★★

DRAG CITY

Poker-faced singer-songwriter from Chicago has a peculiar sense of loser humor

The MVP of indie rock's minor leagues—"I'll only ever be a Gary Numan," he once groaned, only half-joking—Bill "Smog" Callahan has been making records for 15 years, each more gaunt and near-paralyzed than the one before it. This time, he's playing with a minimalist, barely electric trio that wouldn't dare overshadow his sleepy-voiced utterances, painstakingly plucking one note at a time, and writing songs mostly about horses ("I cantered out here; now I'm galloping back") or mortality (a rewrite of Lead Belly's "In the Pines" that couldn't be less like Nirvana's version) or both. His persona is utterly deadpan, but just because he's poker-faced, it doesn't mean it's not funny. Best joke: the one in which he stares →

Spoon's Britt Daniel discovers third testicle.



AMERICAN IDLE

Texas indie greats spin their wheels on fifth album

SPOON

GIMME FICTION ★★★

MERGE

IF SPOON WERE meant to be famous, it would have happened by now. The Austin, Texas, foursome scored a deal with Elektra Records during the post-grunge gold rush and released one jagged, jaded album that sold poorly. Elektra dropped them, Spoon bounced back down to an indie label and then—as if to spite Elektra—became a much better band.

Their great last album, *Kill the Moonlight*, squared the blunt economy of postpunks like Wire with a melo-dramatic sensibility evoking Joe Jackson and the Cars; the songs were deadpan-cool takes on youth gone wild, with lyrics about scoring pot, knocking boots to old Iggy Pop records and doing the devil's bidding.

Gimme Fiction isn't as instantly enthralling. Britt Daniel, the frontman and primary songwriter, remains both deadpan and cool, and his adenoidal bark has mellowed into one of indie rock's great lead instruments. But where *Moonlight*'s portraits of love and lust were as concise and

affecting as panels from an underground comic book, too many *Fiction* tracks seem designed to confound.

This return to murky obscurantism, thankfully, comes with a return to guitar noise, which—as the squalling mayhem of "My Mathematical Mind"—s outtro proves—can be its own reward. And as a rhythm record, *Fiction* straight-up kills—drummer Jim Eno, all but sidelined last time, is in the driver's seat here. The glam-rockish opener, "The Beast and Dragon, Adored," stomps like a hungover vampire descending a staircase; "I Turn My Camera On" throws a disco-shuffle beat under Daniel's

falsetto, et voilà—it's an indie answer to the Rolling

Stones' "Emotional Rescue."

While Spoon find half a dozen ways to reinvent their sound, the best track is a straight pop song, "Sister Jack," complete with jangling guitars, well-placed handclaps and a lovelorn Daniel fantasizing about his time in "a metal band we called Requiem." Spoon's audience is the several thousand people who delight in that kind of rock in-joke.

PAUL PARK

DOWNLOAD: "Sister Jack," "The Two Sides of Monsieur Valentine"



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Bruce remembers funny thing Little Steven once did with bandanna.

THE NEW BOSS

Rock's great seeker battles between hope and gloom

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN

DEVILS & DUST ★★☆☆

COLUMBIA

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN'S *NEBRASKA*, in 1982, implied that life was more or less futile, but he's been revising that position ever since, refining his view of despair. On *Tunnel of Love*, based in the real dimensions of his divorce, he became fascinated by the challenge of moving on; *The Ghost of Tom Joad* evinced political righteousness about the victimization of working families; on *The Rising*, his last record, he was a folk-rock Mr. Incredible trying to personalize the misery of the post-9/11

world and offer hope. Now this:

introspective, evenhanded, barely political and uniformly excellent.

Springsteen has said news events inspire his best work, but *Devils & Dust* comes from deeper places: the thoughts of his characters, who are fighting their own private wars on terror, stuck in memory playbacks and hoping life improves, but lacking the tools to do the job themselves. These 12 songs—recorded mostly with acoustic guitar and a fairly unobtrusive orchestra, and overlaid with stripes of steel guitar and brass—cleave to the theme of hope-is-all-we-have, while stopping short of an unnecessary, pat moral.

"Black Cowboys" focuses on a poor Bronx boy who steals his stepfather's money to head west, having been fed books by his mother about Oklahoma's black cowboys. "Matamoros Banks" relates the thoughts of an illegal immigrant crossing the Rio Grande: "The turtles eat the skin from your eyes/So they lay open to the stars."

They're all pretty, but "Reno" is the song hardest to imagine Springsteen's core audience playing for their young kids. The narrator receives foreplay from a hooker while thinking about his ex-marriage with grim fondness. (The song ends before the sex, so we don't know which of the two options he's chosen:

"Two hundred dollars straight in, two fifty up the ass.")

Every dark Springsteen album needs relief, and it's usually provided by a girl. In "Silver Palomino," he sings instead about an elusive horse: "Our *mustañeros* were the very best, sir/But they could never lay a rope on her." He can't attain the horse, but instead he attains his own sound, the drone in his voice against the drone of the guitar and orchestra; it spreads out the song, making it feel like meditation. Springsteen is 55, and this is musical self-knowledge, or damn close.

BEN RATLIFF

DOWNLOAD: "Reno," "Long Time Comin'," "Silver Palomino"

HE'S STILL REFINING HIS VIEW OF DESPAIR.

THE GUIDE NEW RELEASES

down into a well for an eternity, and finally yells "Fuck all y'all!" into it.

DOUGLAS WOLK

DOWNLOAD: "The Well," "I Feel Like the Mother of the World"

THE STARTING LINE

BASED ON A TRUE STORY ★

DRIVE-THRU/GEFFEN

Sophomore album from sophomore emo-punk goons

First things first: "Bedroom Talk," the lead track here, is gross. Like, really gross. Over crashing waves of guitar, singer/horndog Kenny Vasoli croons, "I'm gonna tear your ass up like we just got married/You're all mine now." The goal, evidently, is to distance the young band from the more sensitive pining of their emo peers, but the result is both crass and transparent, especially when it's followed up by rote "touring is hard/girls are confusing/the record biz is shady" tunes like "The World" and "Inspired By the \$." The last third of the album—packed with bland acoustic balladry—is so sticky-sweet, ladies might forget what Vasoli plans to do with them once the wooing stops. Hot Topic—shoppers of America: Consider yourself warned.

ANDY GREENWALD

DOWNLOAD THESE: None

MARIA TAYLOR

11:11 ★★☆☆

SADDLE CREEK

A comrade of Bright Eyes shows off her songcraft

If there were degrees in songwriting, as in fiction writing, Maria Taylor could have studied at some equivalent of the prestigious Iowa program. Her careful musical backdrops extend from the electronica swirls of "Leap Year" to now-traditional jangle pop; she plays lots of instruments, juggles meter and varies her hooks. "Song Beneath the Song" may be litigiously close to Rilo Kiley, yet gets away with its liftings by treating tunesmithing as a form of self-conscious metafiction. There's lyrical specificity—"We got a house in between a homeless shelter and a coffee shop/We painted the walls until we couldn't reach/I said it looks cool this way, let's stop"—while her singing manages to convey both youth and authorial maturity, which is a neat trick. She should risk more. As is, an ideal soundtrack for the bookish and anti-depressed.

ERIC WEISBARD

DOWNLOAD: "Two of Those Too," "Birmingham 1982"

VARIOUS ARTISTS

WORLD PSYCHEDELIC CLASSICS 3: LOVE'S A REAL THING—THE FUNKY FUZZY SOUNDS OF WEST AFRICA ★★☆☆

LUAKA BOP

Vintage funk, rock and soul from Africa with a hazy purple twist

Label boss David Byrne nets some of Africa's more willfully eccentric 1970s garage psychedelia on this mind-expanding sampler that holds a funhouse mirror up to such late-'60s hitmakers and culture shapers as James Brown, Jimi Hendrix and Kool and the Gang. Orchestre Poly-Rythmo de Cotonou Dahomey's opener for example, drops a jaw-

dropping lexicon of Brownian grunts and yelps over a drum-giddy groove; Nigeria's William Onyeabor implants one of the steamiest funk

vamps ever into the politically cautionary "Better Change Your Mind"; and Manu Dibango's "Ceddo End Title" casts Pink Floyd into the bush of ghosts. Not every track's quite as revelatory as promised, unfortunately, and here's hoping overlooked groups like Psychedelic Aliens and Bob Ohiri make the sequel.

RICHARD GEHR

DOWNLOAD: Manu Dibango, "Ceddo End Title"

LOUDON WAINWRIGHT III

HERE COME THE CHOPPERS! ★★☆☆

SOVEREIGN ARTISTS

Wiseacre and father of a music dynasty writes songs as sad as they are funny

When your son heaps lyrical abuse on you, and your daughter has you in mind as she titles a CD *Bloody Mother Fucking Asshole*, it's tempting to explain your side of the story. Instead, Loudon Wainwright III—father of young singers Rufus and Martha Wainwright—puts down his dukes. This carousing, folk-singing

ASTONISHING FACT!

LOUDON WAINWRIGHT III was in the same third grade class as Liza Minnelli. He says he had a "tremendous crush" on her.

HAYDEN CHRISTENSEN
ACTOR, STAR WARS: EPISODE III—REVENGE OF THE SITH

THE ROOTS
THE TIPPING POINT
GEFFEN

"A classic hip-hop band—real musicians who play their own instruments. It's positive rap. It isn't about killing someone."

cad of a dad has mellowed into a dewy-eyed man of regret, more or less. The CD gets off to a slow start, but about halfway through draws blood with a series of family reminiscences that target himself ("Make Your Mother Mad"). A band of arty studio veterans give him a new set of choppers, and he knows what to do with them. The last song, "Things," is heartsick and dedicated to daughter Lucy. Does she have a record contract yet?

RJ SMITH

DOWNLOAD: "Choppers," "Things," "Hank and Fred"

LUCINDA WILLIAMS

LIVE AT THE FILLMORE ★★★

LOST HIGHWAY

In a perplexing move, alt-country ace reprises her latest album on live double CD

There's no point questioning Lucinda Williams's talent, or her perfectionism. Of course her first live album sounds dandy. There isn't a bad song or performance on it. Unfortunately, there isn't a new song or performance on it either. Every one of its 22 tracks appears in pretty much the same form on one of her painstaking studio albums—including, in an apparent world record, 11 of the 13 titles on 2003's mildly underrated *World Without Tears*. We don't appreciate her new songs, huh? Well, she'll show us—she'll release them again two years later. Sure, they have a little more oomph this time. But why the devotees who adore everything she does would need more proof that she's an effective bandleader is something her record label would surely like to know.

ROBERT CHRISTGAU

DOWNLOAD: "Joy," "Sweet Side"

YOUTH GROUP

SKELETON JAR ★★★

ANTI/EPITAPH

Gorgeous-voiced singer offers up downer-rock from *Down Under*

DINGOS ATE THEIR BABIES! Youth Group hail from the same Australian scene that birthed the Vines and Jet, but don't hold that against them. They're like those bands' shy younger brothers: soft-spoken, undemonstrative and well worth the time to get to know. Their second album (but only the first to broach the northern hemisphere) is a beguiling introduction. With his feathery, Coldplay-worthy tenor, Toby Martin is the star here. His voice arcs and swan-dives, quietly imbuing the pleasant acoustic melodies of "Shadowland" and "The Frankston Line" with something dark, haunting and infectious. Martin's charisma is impressive

Lucinda Williams: "Human flesh does taste like chicken!"



considering his subject matter doesn't stray too far from the well-worn songwriting axis of girls ("Lillian Lies") and mysterious melancholy ("Skeleton Jar")—except on "Why Don't Buildings Cry?," which mines new territory: emo urban planning.

ANDY GREENWALD

DOWNLOAD: "Shadowland," "Skeleton Jar," "Someone Else's Dream"

ZION I

TRUE & LIVIN' ★★★

LIVE UP

Pass the pacifiers—Oakland duo perfect raver-rap on their third album

Zion I are hip-hop anomalies, capable of quoting KRS-One but unafraid of glowsticks. The future-minded duo



of MC Zion and producer Amp Live traffic in an electronica-influenced boom-bap, mining soul samples and techno beats to create an exciting hybrid safe for ravers and rap fanatics alike. Despite some hoity-toity moments ("Poems 4 Post Modern Decay," anyone?), their excellent third album is highlighted by Zion's deft street reports and Amp's soothing, psych-tinged textures and intrepid drum programming (see the stuttering, U.K.-garage-influenced "I Need Mo"). They salute the slang and swagger of their hometown on "The Bay," while "Bird's Eye View" has enough blissful synths to make Yanni jealous.

HUA HSU

DOWNLOAD: "Doin' My Thing," "The Bay"

BLENDER APPROVED

THE BEST NEW RELEASES FROM THE PAST MONTHS



BECK GUERO

INTERSCOPE

Alt-rock's favorite loser puts away the Kleenex, dusts off his turntables and brings back the funk.



THE HOLD STEADY SEPARATION SUNDAY

FRENCHKISS

Seedy tales from the Brooklyn rock underground by *Blender's* new favorite band. Profane and profound.



MARIAH CAREY THE EMANCIPATION OF MIMI

ISLAND

The champagne-flute-shattering pop diva mellows out, with Kanye and Snoop backing her up.



HOT HOT HEAT ELEVATOR

REPRISE

A gleeful major-label debut from four wiseass Canadians with sharp hooks and sharper suits.



50 CENT THE MASSACRE

G-UNIT/AFTERMATH/INTERSCOPE

A cuddly thug with a bulletproof grin, 50 packs this chart-topping follow-up with sexy, sultry menace.



THE MARS VOLTA FRANCES THE MUTE

GSL/STRUMMER/UNIVERSAL

The Texas prog-rockers swing harder than any band with four-part suites and Latin song titles should.

THE

40

MOST
POPULAR
SONGS IN
AMERICAARMENIAN WACKOS, WORLDLY
FRATBOY FAVES: BOW BEFORE THE
GRUNGY MAJESTY OF AUDIOSLAVE!

1

AUDIOSLAVE

"BE YOURSELF"

OUT OF EXILE

On the lead single from their second album, Chris Cornell and his ex-Rage Against the Machine cohorts get mellow—and inspirational. Zack de la Rocha must be spinning in his ... um, where the hell is Zack de la Rocha anyway? This month, Audioslave wrap up a stint playing small clubs and head out for Europe, where they'll tour until July.



HOW WE DID IT

The Most Popular Songs chart is based on radio and video airplay and album sales. Provided by HITSDailyDouble.com: "Proof that any idiot in the music business can have a Web site."

POSITION	TITLE	ARTIST	ALBUM/LABEL
1	"BE YOURSELF"	AUDIOSLAVE	OUT OF EXILE EPIC
2	"B.Y.O.B."	SYSTEM OF A DOWN	MEZMERIZE COLUMBIA
3	"AMERICAN BABY"	DAVE MATTHEWS BAND	STAND UP RCA
4	"BEVERLY HILLS"	WEEZER	MAKE BELIEVE Geffen
5	"THE HAND THAT FEEDS"	NINE INCH NAILS	WITH TEETH INTERSCOPE
6	"JUST A LIL BIT"	50 CENT	THE MASSACRE G-UNIT/AFTERMATH/INTERSCOPE
7	"INCOMPLETE"	BACKSTREET BOYS	NEVER GONE JIVE
8	"SO WHAT THE FUSS"	STEVIE WONDER	A TIME TO LOVE MOTOWN/UNIVERSAL
9	"LYLA"	OASIS	DON'T BELIEVE IN THE TRUTH EPIC
10	"DEVILS & DUST"	BRUCE SPRINGSTEIN	DEVILS & DUST COLUMBIA
11	"OH"	CIARA	GOODIES LAFACE
12	"WE BELONG TOGETHER"	MARIAH CAREY	THE EMANCIPATION OF MIMI ISLAND
13	"HATE IT OR LOVE IT"	THE GAME	THE DOCUMENTARY AFTERMATH/G-UNIT/INTERSCOPE
14	"SPEED OF SOUND"	COLDPLAY	X&Y CAPITOL
15	"BEHIND THESE HAZEL EYES"	KELLY CLARKSON	BREAKAWAY RCA
16	"FEEL GOOD INC."	GORILLAZ	DEMON DAYS VIRGIN
17	"LONELY"	AKON	TROUBLE SRC/UNIVERSAL
18	"GOIN' CRAZY"	NATALIE	NATALIE LATUM/UNIVERSAL
19	"HOLIDAY"	GREEN DAY	AMERICAN IDIOT REPRISE
20	"HOLLABACK GIRL"	GWEN STEFANI	LOVE, ANGEL, MUSIC, BABY. INTERSCOPE
21	"SOME CUT"	TRILLVILLE	WELCOME TO TRILLVILLE REPRISE
22	"MR. BRIGHTSIDE"	THE KILLERS	HOT FUSS ISLAND
23	"SITTING, WAITING, WISHING"	JACK JOHNSON	IN BETWEEN DREAMS BRUSHFIRE/UNIVERSAL
24	"SLOW DOWN"	BOBBY VALENTINO	DISTURBING THE PEACE PRESENTS: BOBBY VALENTINO DEF JAM
25	"TRUTH IS"	FANTASIA	FREE YOURSELF J RECORDS
26	"WALKING DEAD"	Z-TRIP	SHIFTING GEARS HOLLYWOOD
27	"AN HONEST MISTAKE"	THE BRAVERY	THE BRAVERY ISLAND
28	"RIGHT TO BE WRONG"	JOSS STONE	MIND, BODY AND SOUL S CURVE
29	"HOW TO DEAL"	FRANKIE J	THE ONE COLUMBIA
30	"SOMETIMES YOU CAN'T MAKE IT ON YOUR OWN"	U2	HOW TO DISMANTLE AN ATOMIC BOMB INTERSCOPE
31	"CANDY SHOP"	50 CENT	THE MASSACRE G-UNIT/AFTERMATH/INTERSCOPE
32	"REMEDY"	SEETHER	KARMA AND EFFECT WIND-UP
33	"KARMA"	ALICIA KEYS	THE DIARY OF ALICIA KEYS J RECORDS
34	"BREATHE (2 AM)"	ANNA NALICK	WRECK OF THE DAY COLUMBIA
35	"GRIND WITH ME"	PRETTY RICKY	BLUE STARS ATLANTIC
36	"LONELY NO MORE"	ROB THOMAS	SOMETHING TO BE ATLANTIC
37	"DON'T PHUNK WITH MY HEART"	BLACK EYED PEAS	MONKEY BUSINESS A&M
38	"ORDINARY PEOPLE"	JOHN LEGEND	GET LIFTED SONY URBAN/COLUMBIA
39	"SHE'S NO YOU"	JESSE MCCARTNEY	BEAUTIFUL SOUL HOLLYWOOD
40	"GIRL"	DESTINY'S CHILD	DESTINY FULFILLED COLUMBIA



DAVE MATTHEWS BAND

"AMERICAN BABY"

STAND UP

In the time since the last DMB album, Dave Matthews has dropped a solo album—and his tour bus dropped several gallons of human waste on a bunch of unwitting tourists. Now he's back with his mates for their sixth album together. Catch them live this summer: In June, they'll play Missouri and Ohio, in July they'll hit New York, and Cali by August.

8

STEVIE WONDER

"SO WHAT THE FUSS"

A TIME TO LOVE

"Three girls, a blind guy and an androgynous half-pint dressed in purple velvet walk into a studio." No, it's not your lame uncle's latest joke—it's the new Stevie Wonder single! Featuring Prince on guitar and En Vogue singing backup, the Motown legend kicks off his first album in 10 years with this funky celebration of peace and love. Catch his national tour later this summer.



GORILLAZ

"FEEL GOOD INC."

DEMON DAYS

Not since the days of Davy Jones and his Monkees have music fans been so in love with four prefab pop primates. On this single, Damon Albarn's comic-strip band get heads nodding with help from rappers De La Soul. A live appearance is unlikely (they're freakin' cartoons!), but check out the gorgeously trippy video, all over MTV2.

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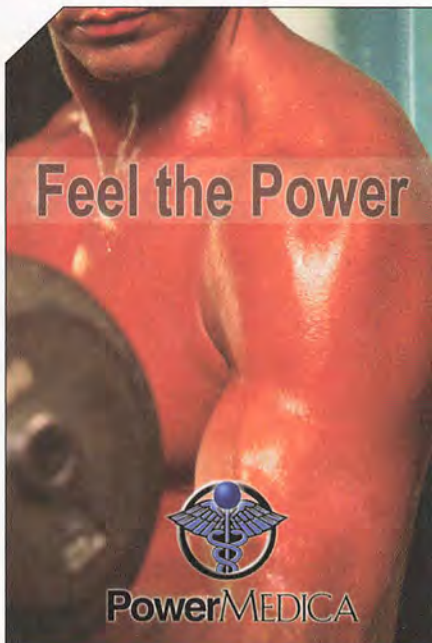
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Def Leppard at Jack
Murphy Stadium, San
Diego, 1983 (left to
right): Rick Savage, Rick
Allen, Phil Collen, Joe
Elliott and Steve Clark.



IT'S ONE OF THEIR
TOP THREE OR FOUR
GREATEST-HITS PACKAGES.

MINT CONDITION

Some FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS about a British rock group who turned vulgarity into a fortune

DEF LEPPARD

ROCK OF AGES: THE DEFINITIVE COLLECTION

★★★★

BLUDGEON RIFFOLA/ISLAND/UME

WHAT'S THE DEAL WITH THEIR NAME?



The five lads from Sheffield, England, first called themselves Deaf Leopard, but changed the spelling early on to honor their heroes, Led Zeppelin, whom they never sounded anything like.

IS IT TRUE THEIR DRUMMER HAS ONLY ONE ARM?

To focus on this issue rather than on the band's heroic invention of unapologetic trash-rock, singer Joe Elliott's artfully pre-ripped jeans or guitarist Steve Clark's 1991 death from drug and alcohol poisoning seems perverse. But since you asked after drummer Rick Allen: Sometimes he had only one arm, sometimes he didn't. This collection is cleverly arranged out of chronological order so as to disguise the moment when the drumming skewed right.

IS IT TRUE THAT AC/DC'S PRODUCER MADE DEF LEP WHAT THEY WERE?

Mutt Lange did bring considerable experience to his role. But it was with the Lep that he perfected his mélange of big beats, shimmering guitar rhythms and densely layered vocals. If Def Leppard had been a hot chick, he would have married it.

IF DEF LEPPARD WERE A HOT CHICK, WHAT WOULD IT BE CALLED?

Shania Twain.

IS IT TRUE THAT EVERY SINGLE INDIVIDUAL IN THE WORLD LOVES "POUR SOME SUGAR ON ME"?

Almost. Those who hate the single most beautiful expression of freedom ever created, in which hard rock, glam, pub rock, new wave, hair metal and disco are unleashed in a never-ending four minutes

of unadulterated liberty, are those who hate us for our freedom. We will find them, we will smoke them out, we will take them roller-skating on a Friday night.

IS THAT SONG ALL DEF LEPPARD HAS GOING FOR THEM?

Hardly. This band has at least 10 masterpieces, and several more that are better than any Mötley Crüe song (not including "Kickstart My Heart").

SO, IS THIS REALLY THE "DEFINITIVE COLLECTION"?

Depends on how you define *definitive*. It's certainly one of the top three or four Greatest Hits packages from the band. The main difference between this and the limited-edition *Best Of*, which has been out for more than 150 days, is one new song, "Work It Out," which sounds like a tasty Collective Soul b-side. That, and this one has a Badfinger cover; *Best Of* only had a Kinks cover.

BUT WHAT IF I ALREADY HAVE PYROMANIA AND HYSTERIA?

This collection draws from many of their 10 studio albums. You'd still be missing, for example, their first smash hit, "Bringin' On the Heartbreak," the blueprint for what made the '80s good: Slaughter, Poison, Winger, Firehouse, all those beasts of hockey-rink rock. Guns N' Roses would never have been compelled to put an end to the nerf-metal era if not for the genius of the Lep.

In all honesty, however: No. If you have those two records, you already have "Sugar," "Hysteria," "Rocket," "Photograph," "Foolin'," "Rock of Ages"—and you're pretty much good to go.

WHAT ARE THEY SAYING IN FAKE GERMAN AT THE BEGINNING OF "ROCK OF AGES"?

"I am a jelly doughnut."

RENE VIENET

DOWNLOAD "Pour Some Sugar on Me," "Bringin' On the Heartbreak," "Hysteria"

THE SCORE

★★★★★
A CLASSIC

★★★★
GREAT

★★★
GOOD

★★
MEDIOCRE

★
FOUL

BELLE AND SEBASTIAN PUSH BARMAN TO OPEN OLD WOUNDS ★★★★★

MATADOR

Essential rarities from fey Scottish popsters who make the Carpenters sound like G-Unit

Even for a ragged, eight-member twee-folk collective, Belle and Sebastian have always been contrary. The band maintains a rep

for staying frustratingly obscure, mostly because in the late '90s—perhaps in tribute to heroes/fellow fops the Smiths and Felt—they released many of their best songs as a series of import-only EPs. *Push Barmen* is a long overdue double-disc collection of every one, from the velvety “A Century of Fakers” to the surprisingly raw and rocking “Lazy Line Painter Jane.” Singer Stuart Murdoch was never better—or more deliciously coy—than when narrating these 25 charming tales of shy girls dabbling in photography and bookish boys dabbling in shy girls. Anorak and thick-framed glasses sold separately.

ANDY GREENWALD

DOWNLOAD: “String Bean Jean,” “A Century of Fakers,” “Slow Graffiti”

CONCRETE BLONDE

THE ESSENTIAL CONCRETE BLONDE ★★★★★

CAPITOL

Solid, workmanlike rock from almost famous Hollywood trio

Not every bohemian at the coffee-house can be Beck or Patti Smith. Somebody has to be Concrete Blonde: the folks who have all the



Buy the new Belle and Sebastian album or all these puppies die.

desire and plenty of the talent but lack the originality or smarts to break out of the pack. Earthbound, a little familiar in their 4/4 dance-rock rhythms, they didn't have a trunkful of memorable quirks. Which is OK in life, and, as this best-of proves, it's OK in music too. Concrete Blonde—born in Hollywood in 1981, fronted by the athletic voice of Johnette Napolitano and still occasionally together—had a good ride and more than their share of good records. Alt-rock oldsters might remember “Joey,” which reached No. 19 on the pop charts, and “Tomorrow, Wendy.” But maybe what's best and truest

here is the stuff that didn't quite chart, songs like “God Is a Bullet” and “Caroline,” crunching rock wrapped in dark, brooding edges. These songs are the sound of the band at its most concrete.

RJ SMITH

DOWNLOAD: “Still in Hollywood,” “God Is a Bullet”

ELVIS COSTELLO KING OF AMERICA ★★★★★

RHINO

A brutal, brilliant British take on Americana

In the mid-'80s, Elvis Costello temporarily fell out with the Attrac-

LADY IN AUTUMN

Homing in on the neglected middle period of a true American idol

BILLIE HOLIDAY THE ULTIMATE COLLECTION ★★★★★

HIP-O/VERVE

BILLIE HOLIDAY STANDS at or near the top of any knowledgeable short list of American singers. In the rock era, not even Aretha Franklin, Elvis Presley or Al Green is in her class—her only competition is Louis Armstrong, whose improvisational smarts she emulated, and Frank Sinatra, who adored her. Yet Holiday had a much smaller voice than those titans, and by 1959, when she died of alcohol abuse at 44, it was a wreck. Her magic is in her languid timing, conversational intimacy and above all physical timbre—young and buttery or brandy on the rocks, it goes down so easy.

Not even the live performances on the accompanying DVD render these two CDs “ultimate.” Holiday can't be contained like that. Columbia's early two-CD *Lady Day* and the Lester Young-accompanied *A Fine Romance* are at least as essential, as is Verve's late two-CD *Lady in*

Autumn. For licensing reasons, this overview offers just a taste of the buoyant '30s Billie, already worldly yet set on fun, while doing better by the careworn '50s Billie.

What makes it invaluable is the way it bridges the two periods. Though interrupted by wartime recording bans and a prison stint for heroin, the 1940s found Holiday no longer feigning innocence but still clear-voiced. The strings she invited and the big-band conventions her producer applied can be hard to take in large doses. These tracks are so astutely chosen, though, that their star-time phase seems natural—a strength, even.

Because Holiday destroyed her body and couldn't resist mean mistreaters, she's come to symbolize female victimization. But even in suffering she was vibrant, and this set gets the proportions right. Not all these songs are sad, and she owns every one—a fathomless artist guaranteed to reward as many hours as you invest in her.

ROBERT CHRISTGAU

DOWNLOAD: “What a Little Moonlight Can Do,” “Easy Living”

Billie Holiday accidentally shampooed with fertilizer.



tions, his rampaging New Wave trio, and instead hooked up with a bunch of American studio vets, some of whom had played with the previous King Elvis. Turning his Yankee fetish into a theme, he cast his withering British eye across the foreign landscape that had produced his beloved Johnny Cash and George Jones records. The result was his wisest, most controlled music ever—about the sense of alienation at the heart of country music and the sense of exile that haunts American culture—and also some of his liveliest performances; he's rarely sounded as if he's having this much fun singing. This re-expanded edition appends a pile of boozy solo demos, a set of rambunctious live R&B covers and a delicious rockabilly single, "The People's Limousine," originally issued under the pseudonym the Coward Brothers.

DOUGLAS WOLK

DOWNLOAD: "Brilliant Mistake," "The Big Light," "The People's Limousine"

JEFFERSON AIRPLANE

THE ESSENTIAL JEFFERSON AIRPLANE ★★★

RCA/LEGACY

Essence-of-the-'60s hippies wave their freak flag for posterity

Jefferson Airplane were a San Francisco folk-rock band who in their hit-making phase comprised two clandestinely showbiz vocalists (Grace Slick and Marty Balin), a snazzy enough guitarist who never did anything else with his life (Paul Kantner), a clunky drummer in a scene rife with them, and Hot Tuna. Rock and Roll Hall of Famers still busy symbolizing the Summer of Love almost four decades later, they released this two-CD compilation in honor of the BMG-Sony merger, and it's not bad. The Airplane wrote some good tunes, even if they oversang and overarranged them. And while they could get pretty ridiculous—anyone for "Have You Seen the Saucers?"—they adapted better than many competing ex-folkies to the psychedelic space jam that was the Haight-Ashbury ballrooms' enduring footnote to musical history.

ROBERT CHRISTGAU

DOWNLOAD: "Crown of Creation," "White Rabbit"

BARRY MANILOW

THE ESSENTIAL BARRY MANILOW ★★★

ARISTA/LEGACY

Sucking in the '70s with MOR's roughest, toughest Nice Jewish Boy

Call Barry Manilow whatever you like, but don't call him a wimp. In his chart-topping '70s heyday, Manilow was as aggressive as any musician—a militant schlockmeister who



Jefferson Airplane: "Let's smoke this thing!"

combined Broadway-style orchestration, soaring last-chorus octave leaps and enough lyrical cheese to fill the French countryside in an all-out effort to overwhelm and entertain. Today, big, blowsy ballads like "Mandy" and "Tryin' to Get the Feeling Again"—and, of course, the "Latin disco" epic "Copacabana"—stand as pure period kitsch, but there's no denying their melodies. What impresses most is Manilow's determination to shout down the rafters every time, a habit that links him to primordial pop-schmaltz specialists like Al Jolson, and reminds you that easy listening and soft rock aren't always easy, or soft.

JODY ROSEN

DOWNLOAD: "Mandy," "Copacabana"

CHARLIE POOLE

YOU AIN'T TALKIN' TO ME: CHARLIE POOLE AND THE ROOTS OF COUNTRY MUSIC ★★★★★

COLUMBIA/LEGACY

Carolina banjo plucker was the missing link between "coon songs" and bluegrass

This 1920s banjoist, with his string trio the North Carolina Ramblers, broke big in 1925 with "Don't Let Your Deal Go Down," changed W.C. Handy's "Hesitating Blues" into "If

the River Was Whiskey" and generally kicked ass until he drank himself to death in 1931 at 39. In other words, he was more hammering Hank Jr. than he was haunted Hank. But this collection's brilliance is its comparative approach: Two of the three discs feature the 1902–1912 original versions of songs by the likes of Arthur Collins, Billy Murray and Cal Stewart that Poole later covered, and show how what we now think of as country evolved in part from racist "coon songs," brass marching bands and Victorian Tin Pan Alley weepers. It makes "roots" music seem less pure but a lot more interesting.

ERIC WEISBARD

DOWNLOAD: Charlie Poole and the North Carolina Ramblers, "White House Blues" and "If I Lose I Don't Care"; Arthur Collins, "Moving Day"

THE RASPBERRIES

GREATEST ★★★

CAPITOL

An Ohio band who took on the '70s by refusing to wake up from the pop dream of the '60s

The Raspberries snuck onto the landscape in 1970, just as pompous rock bands were beginning to proliferate alarmingly. Instead, this new outfit—defined largely by Eric Carmen's distinctive heartthrob crooning—brought echoes of the best sounds of '60s pop (the Hollies, the Kinks, the Small Faces) into the new decade. *Greatest* hits the highlights of the Raspberries' five-year career and proves that sometimes, being stubborn holdouts is the best way to ensure longevity. "Let's Pretend," with its swooning guitars, is a wistful pop masterpiece nearly in league with the Beach Boys' "Wouldn't It Be Nice." The Raspberries dug beefy rock, too—the scrubbed-raw guitar break in "Ecstasy" reads like a mini love letter to the Who. Perhaps to the detriment of their career, the



The Raspberries audition for *Starsky, Starsky, Starsky* and *Hutch*.

Raspberries never got over the British invasion. But they made something fresh from it, and the music they left behind hasn't gone stale yet.

STEPHANIE ZACHAREK

DOWNLOAD: "Let's Pretend," "Go All the Way," "Nobody Knows"

SCREAMING TREES

OCEAN OF CONFUSION: SONGS OF SCREAMING TREES, 1989–1996 ★★★

EPIC/LEGACY

Tumultuous band from rural Washington were like Nirvana, only without all the greatness and hits



When Nirvana made grunge a headline word in 1991, the Screaming Trees already seemed like a band from another era. The intensity of their early records on SST and their scholarly take on garage punk were profound influences on Nirvana, Soundgarden and (especially) Pearl Jam. On the *Trees'* subsequent major-label albums, the source of this anthology, you can hear why they never clicked with teens: The backwoods reek is too tangy, the interlocking guitars too elaborate and Mark Lanegan's crooning too bitter. With the exception of the uncharacteristically poppy "Nearly Lost You," from the *Singles* soundtrack, they never really had a hit. But cleaned up and laundered of dated filler, this collection feels great, like a favorite old flannel shirt rediscovered in the back of a closet at your mom's house.

JONATHAN GOLD

DOWNLOAD: "Nearly Lost You," "Shadows of the Season"

SLOAN

A SIDES WIN ★★★

KOCH

'60s-adoring rock band is huge in Canada—but then, so is ice fishing

Orderly in what we stereotypically regard as the Canadian manner—14 singles in chronological order, plus two new songs—Sloan are as well-known at home as they are unknown in America. Like so many rock bands

I LOVE THIS CD:



MATTHEW MCCONAUGHEY
ACTOR, DAZED AND CONFUSED, SAHARA

PINK FLOYD
DARK SIDE OF THE MOON CAPITOL

"It's great to listen to when you're driving at 2 A.M. and there's no one else on the highway. It gives you such good energy."

THE GUIDE

who live for an evanescence of hook, harmony and cleverness that would have sounded perfect on the radio circa 1968, and at best achieve it only once or twice per album, a compilation is the way to go. Sloan are blessed with gifts for wiggly guitar hooks, slamming drums and clever wordplay, yet cursed with earnest, undistinguished singing. Still, as they invoke the joys of finding new words in the dictionary ("Underwhelmed") or carefully catalogue mistakes made on both sides of a busted relationship ("The Lines You Amend"), their power chords and cymbal crashes can align into power-pop bliss.

KEN TUCKER

DOWNLOAD: "Underwhelmed," "The Lines You Amend," "The Rest of My Life"

TINDERSTICKS

WORKING FOR THE MAN: GREATEST HITS ***

KOCH

A decade of gorgeous moans from U.K. gloomsters

QUIET, DEPRESSED, BRITISH

While fellow British rock outfits Oasis and Radiohead dominated sales charts and hogged magazine covers during the '90s, Tindersticks quietly seduced a cult following with their elegant orchestral despair. This career-spanning collection recaps the band's strong suits: Dickon Hinchliffe's slithery violin melodrama, David Boulter's ominous, *Twin Peaks*-ian keyboards and Stuart Staples's alcohol-and-suicide crooning. Impressionistic ballads like "Patchwork" and "I Know That Loving" evoke ghostly bars, heart-breaking Goth gals and an air of sophisticated cool, making misery sound like something glorious and dreamy. Avoid the higher-priced import version of this release, which adds a second disc, unearthly forgettable B-sides and indulgent rarities that don't hold an incense candle to the band's best material.

TIM GRIERSON

DOWNLOAD: "Patchwork," "I Know That Loving"

I LOVE THIS CD!



SIMON COWELL
HOST,
AMERICAN IDOL

FRANK SINATRA THE VERY BEST OF FRANK SINATRA

INTERSCOPE

"He was a true original. Great voice. Never pitchy. No one even comes close in my book."



Paul Westerberg:
"Call me Fidel."

VARIOUS ARTISTS

HEARING IS BELIEVING: THE JACK NITZSCHE STORY ***

ACE

Unusual artifacts from a behind-the-scenes king of '60s cool

Among arrangers—those quasi-classical studio geeks who add orchestral instruments to pop records—Jack Nitzsche was a rock star. Whether helping Phil Spector construct the Wall of Sound, assembling a choir for the Rolling Stones' "You Can't Always Get What You Want" or coaxing the grandiose "Expecting to Fly" out of Neil Young, Nitzsche was a lynchpin of the baroque sensibility

that overtook rock in the '60s and early '70s; his strings were the ultimate accessory, a bangle on the perfect song's wrist. This 26-track overview skips the biggies in favor of the offbeat, including an unusually soulful-sounding Lesley Gore. Some of his experiments were too far out—a dud called "Road to Nowhere" by a shrieker named Judy Henske needs no revival—but anyone who could charm bad-girl breathlessness out of Doris Day deserves to go down in history.

KAREN SCHOEMER

DOWNLOAD: Doris Day, "Move Over, Darling"; Frankie Laine, "Don't Make My Baby Blue"; Bob Lind, "Cheryl's Going Home"



Sloan—or Bill Gates in his hipster phase?

VARIOUS ARTISTS

SON CUBANO NYC: CUBAN ROOTS NEW YORK SPICES 1972-1982 ***

HONEST JONS

Cuban exiles move to the U.S., fight cold weather with warm grooves.

New immigrants succeed in New York City by getting more focused and hard-nosed. That's what happened in the 1970s to the Cuban son *montuno*, an older, elegantly lilting rhythm revived up north by expatriate Cuban musicians. Percussion, paired trumpets, graceful piano and the wiry picking of the small guitar called the *tres* defined the sound, and as virtuosos like the sweetly probing trumpeter Chocolate Armentero improvised, two-chord vamps could stretch for dancers. Across a dozen songs, tropical ease gives way to urban propulsion, and while the lyrics often look back to

BLENDER APPROVED

THE BEST REISSUES FROM THE PAST MONTHS



ERIC B. AND RAKIM

FOLLOW THE LEADER

GEFFEN

Rap's first virtuoso proved "I ain't no joke" with this swaggering second set, now with bonus tracks.



JOHN MELLENCAMP

UH-HUH

ISLAND

The Springsteen of Middle America came into his own with odes to fighting authority and little pink houses.



THE CURE

PORNOGRAPHY

FICTION/ELEKTRA/RHINO

Jenna Jameson fans beware: On this '82 freakout, Robert Smith's idea of sexy is praying for death. Hot!



OSZDY OSBOURNE

PRINCE OF DARKNESS

EPIC

Metal's favorite doddering dad covers the Stones and duets with Miss Piggy on this four-CD roundup.



EAGLES

EAGLES BOX

WSM/RHINO

The complete studio works from the El Lay outlaws who made *Deadwood* and Beck's cowboy hats possible.



YO LA TENGO

PRISONERS OF LOVE

MATADOR

Indie rock's favorite mom-and-pop outfit celebrate 21 years in business with this gorgeous retrospective.

Cuba, the music finds pan-American allies, including the album's most striking singer, Lita Branda of Peru. Behind the suavity is urban steel.

JON PARELES

DOWNLOAD: Lita Branda, "Yo Perdí el Corazón"; Henry Fiol, "Tiene Sabor"

VARIOUS ARTISTS

TINY IDOLS: TRANSMISSIONS FROM THE INDIE UNDERGROUND, 1991-1995

★★★

SNOWGLOBE

American D.I.Y. rock from the years after punk broke

In the early '90s, every guitar band in America realized it could put out a record, and for a few years there was a flood of D.I.Y. vinyl with little or no interest in the "big time." Assembled on the model of *Nuggets*, the 1972 roundup of mid-'60s garage-rock, *Tiny Idols* is the first of a proposed series compiling long-out-of-print mix-tape favorites by unjustly obscure U.S. artists (Licorice Roots, Sea Saw), as well as a few justly obscure ones. Further's "California Bummer" is the archetypal song here: hazy, headlong psychedelia, with a deliberately screwed-up balance of falsetto cheer and guitar-amp sludge. Too often, though, the set includes a representative song for a band, rather than a great one.

DOUGLAS WOLK

DOWNLOAD: The Strapping Fieldhands, "Boo Hoo Hoo"; Nothing Painted Blue, "Big Pink Heart"

GENE VINCENT

THE ROAD IS ROCKY ★★★

BEAR FAMILY

8-CD overdose of a rock pioneer

In 1956, Capitol Records was in a hurry to sign someone like Elvis Presley, whom Gene Vincent had just seen. So the label got a 21-year-old from Virginia with bad skin, a damaged leg and a premature liquor habit. On his first few sessions—his lone top ten hit, "Be-Bop-a-Lula,"

"Woman Love" and "Who Slapped John"—Vincent's vocals were crazily alive, with echoed hiccups bouncing all over. Yet after a year or so, that was it. Vincent was never prepared for the long haul; his leg and his drinking habit worsened, and he followed the path of least resistance. Among other bummers, he was importuned to record "Be-Bop-a-Lula" twice again in the '60s, with predictably flat results. He made some OK country music, including a fairly modern but unfocused record in 1970, a year before his demise. But this mammoth box isn't the best way to appreciate Vincent; he died at 36, having recorded about seven CDs of crap out of the eight here.

BEN RATLIFF

DOWNLOAD: "Be-Bop-a-Lula"

PAUL WESTERBERG

BESTERBERG: THE BEST OF PAUL WESTERBERG ★★★★★

SIRE/REPRISE/RHINO

The mature work of a permanent adolescent and rock romantic

In the Replacements, the probing, unreliable Minneapolis punk band he led, Paul Westerberg's theme was "I Will Dare." Solo and disappointed, it became "World Class Fad" or "It's a Wonderful Lie," not nearly as romantic. But Westerberg's fixation remains the way adolescence, or rock & roll, or art and love, make hope sacred. He's just living on the other side of the blessed moment. So while he'll always be frustrated, and frustrating, he's also carved out a niche as singular as the glazed melodies and offhand profundities he applies like hairspray to his restrained-tempo, ringing-guitar pop. And lines like "He wants to play Romeo and Juliet/I'll play Peter Perretti" (leader of the Only Ones, another world-class lost band) explain why in the end he mostly became a heartland rocker for punk record collectors.

ERIC WEISBARD

DOWNLOAD: "Knocking on Mine"

REISSUES IN BRIEF BY JON YOUNG

Brandy: "For the last time, my name is not Moesha!"



HERB ALPERT'S TIJUANA BRASS

WHIPPED CREAM AND OTHER DELIGHTS ★★★

SHOUT! FACTORY

In 1965, Alpert's chart-topping album—part of a huge new reissue campaign for the trumpeter—seemed like a bland easy-listening retort to rock & roll. Today it sounds far weirder, the fake Mexican horns and peppy game-show melodies suggesting a deranged lounge band. Featuring the legendary cover photo of a hot chick clad only in dessert topping.

BRANDY

BEST OF BRANDY ★★★

ATLANTIC

A pop star at 15 (1994's "I Wanna Be Down") and a sitcom headliner (Moesha) soon after, Brandy Norwood's slinky R&B explores desire without getting pushy. Highlights include "The Boy Is Mine," a sultry duet with Monica, and the hypnotic "Talk About Our Love," co-starring a silver-tongued Kanye West.

ROKY ERICKSON

DON'T SLANDER ME ★★★★★

RYKODISC

This Texas psychedelic-music great has taken his visions of aliens and vampires too seriously, landing in a mental institution more than once. From 1986, *Slander* finds him in relatively coherent shape, mixing dark tales and surprising moments of sweetness. With good reason, two songs have "crazy" in the titles.

ASTOR PIAZZOLLA

THE ROUGH GUIDE ★★★★★

WORLD MUSIC NETWORK

If tango conjures imagery of corny ballroom dancing to you, check out Argentina's late, great master of the accordion-like *bandoneon*. This dazzling batch of '70s and '80s tracks offers a jazz-classical hybrid with unsettling rhythms and dramatic, sexy melodies guaranteed to inspire sleazy thoughts.

ROLLING STONES

SUCKING IN THE SEVENTIES ★★

VIRGIN

Reveling in its cynicism, this 1981 set compiles gems ("Shattered," a nasty response to punk) and junk ("Fool to Cry"), adding useless obscurities to snag fanatics. Give points, however, for "Everything Is Turning to Gold," a greasy B-side that features Mick Jagger's loudest James Brown impression.

CAT STEVENS

MAJIKAT: EARTH TOUR 1976 ★★★★★

EAGLE

Before he became Yusuf Islam and fled the pop scene, the British folk hippie milked his catalogue on one final tour. Although the intimate charms of "Moonshadow" and "Wild World" are largely lost on the echoey big stage, "Father & Son" remains a touching meditation on mortality, and "Peace Train" is still a nice idea worth taking seriously.

BILLY SWAN

GREATEST HITS ★★★★★

COLLECTOR'S CHOICE

Best known for the easy-rolling 1974 smash "I Can Help," Swan's southern-fried grooves showcase a rockabilly-soul hybrid that feels as natural as a sunny day in the yard. While most songs are toe-tapping fun, the snail's-pace cover of Elvis Presley's "Don't Be Cruel" is so odd it could be considered an avant-garde experiment.

ROBERT WYATT

NOTHING CAN STOP US ★★★★★

RYKODISC

Admired by Elvis Costello and Pink Floyd, the wheelchair-bound Wyatt has brought warmth and wit to British art-rock since the '60s. On this 1982 LP—the best of his four titles simultaneously reissued—the outspoken leftist turns his sweet, dreamy voice to political concerns, the peak being an eerie take on Billie Holiday's anti-racism classic "Strange Fruit."

BURIED TREASURE UNEARTHING LOST CLASSICS

BASEHEAD

PLAY WITH TOYS ★★★★★

IMAGO, 1992

Lo-fi slacker pop begins here. A good two years before Beck turned a similar style into a Gen-X archetype, Basehead leader Michael Ivey combined sluggish hip-hop beats, finger-picked acoustic guitars and pop hooks to create eleven hood-

eyed odes to beer and low self-esteem. Though this D.C. ensemble never duplicated this record—less a collection of songs than one long, drowsy ramble, a stoner's suite—it stands as a lost classic, a record that caught the early-'90s zeitgeist but never caught commercial fire.

JODY ROSEN

DOWNLOAD: "Brand New Day," "Ode to My Favorite Beer"



BOB DYLAN

PART 1: IN THE STUDIO, 1963–1979

Rock & roll's greatest songwriter started out singing covers BY DOUGLAS WOLK

EVERY
ORIGINAL
CD
REVIEWED

BOB DYLAN NEVER planned to be the Bob Dylan of his generation—he just wrote songs so eloquent that millions of people felt he spoke for them. When teenage Robert Zimmerman arrived in New York City from Hibbing, Minnesota, in 1961, he created the Dylan persona: a socially conscious curmudgeon with an acoustic guitar who knew every folk song ever written and could rewrite them all better. He spent most of the next 20 years fighting his reputation as a folk singer, adopting a new style for virtually every album: country, arena rock, vintage folk blues and even, by the end of the '70s, evangelical Christian soul. At his worst in the '60s and '70s, he was awkward, self-righteous, snobbishly hip; at his best he was a magnificent and ambitious songwriter, the finest of his era, a thin, wild, mercurial genius who slipped something old and heady into rock & roll.



Folk singers:
Not known for
their footwear.

CLASSIC

HIGHWAY 61 REVISITED

COLUMBIA, 1965

★★★★★

BOB DYLAN HIGHWAY 61 REVISITED



"I'm not gonna be able to make a record better than that one," Dylan has said; no kidding. Arrogant, hilarious and fearsomely smart, his sixth

album ripped open the three-minute rock-song barrier with "Like a Rolling Stone," and it keeps rampaging all the way through to the apocalyptic kiss-off "Desolation Row." If he spends a lot of time sneering at the people who don't get it, well, that's his right.

Download: "Like a Rolling Stone," "Ballad of a Thin Man," "Desolation Row"

JOHN WESLEY HARDING

COLUMBIA, 1967

★★★★★



Everyone else was gobbling acid and recording the colors of their day-glo minds, so Dylan perversely made a sober, distilled, Bible-inflected

album—song structures as plain as Hank Williams's, with opaque but evocative little parables, presented in slate-gray arrangements. Every word, note and beat is measured out with miserly reserve. 38 years later, it just sounds timeless and mysterious; many of its songs are still staples of his live shows. **Download:** "All Along the Watchtower," "I'll Be Your Baby Tonight"

BLOOD ON THE TRACKS

COLUMBIA, 1975

★★★★★



His greatest and most emotionally intense album: ten perfect songs about how love will kick your ass every time, written while woman troubles

were kicking his. Dylan re-recorded half of it less than three weeks before its release, but he got it right: Its understatement lets his best lyrics in years do their work, from the coppery viciousness of "Idiot Wind" to the time- and perspective-shifting intricacies of "Tangled Up in Blue," and he sings them with painstaking interpretive spin. **Download:** "Tangled Up in Blue," "You're Gonna Make Me Lonesome When You Go"

GREAT

FREEWHEELIN' BOB DYLAN

COLUMBIA, 1963

★★★★★



His second album defined the sound of folk music—"Blowin' in the Wind" was an instant standard. He also unveiled his nutty sense of

humor, and a nasty side: He pulverizes warmongers and an ex with all the weight of the English language.

Download: "Don't Think Twice, It's All Right," "A Hard Rain's a-Gonna Fall"

BRINGING IT ALL BACK HOME

COLUMBIA, 1965

★★★★★



Purists went ballistic when Dylan went electric here, but he gained everything and lost nothing. His hotwired folk blues, brain-bending rhymes

and hyperactive word-spasms add extra juice and depth.

Download: "Subterranean Homesick Blues," "Maggie's Farm"

BLONDE ON BLONDE

COLUMBIA, 1966

★★★★



Backed by baffled Nashville session guys, Dylan made a stoner double LP: a jolly drug singalong, "Rainy Day Women #12 and 35," plus a stoner's endless

attention span, horniness and spaced-out singing. Too filler-laden to be a masterpiece; still pretty awesome.

Download: "Leopard-Skin Pill-Box Hat"

THE BASEMENT TAPES

COLUMBIA, 1975

★★★★



After a near-fatal 1966 motorcycle crash, he recorded a mountain of casual, half-whimsical, unshakably haunting demos with the Band. This

muddy, eight-years-late selection does only partial justice to the music for which bootlegging was invented.

Download: "This Wheel's on Fire"

GOOD

BOB DYLAN

COLUMBIA, 1962

★★★



Dylan's debut, recorded for \$402, introduces a 20-year-old Woody Guthrie fanatic with a repertoire that's almost all covers, guitar technique

picked up from every blues 78 he could scrounge and miles of cocky attitude.

Download: "Baby, Let Me Follow You Down," "House of the Risin' Sun"

THE TIMES THEY ARE A-CHANGIN'

COLUMBIA, 1964

★★★★



Girlfriend Suze Rotolo led Dylan to lefty activism, then split for Italy, breaking his heart. The result, released just as Beatlemania hit: his most sternly

political album, piling up one mammoth finger-pointing verse on another.

Download: "The Times They Are a-Changin'"

ANOTHER SIDE OF BOB DYLAN

COLUMBIA, 1964

★★★★



Dylan knocked out his fourth album in a single evening. Everyone expected more politics, so he disavowed activism with "My Back Pages" and offered

bitter love songs instead.

Download: "I Don't Believe You"

DESIRE

COLUMBIA, 1975

★★★★



Mostly co-written by theatre director Jacques Levy, this is Dylan's storytelling record: dramatic ballads (about framed-for-murder boxer Rubin

"Hurricane" Carter, gangster Joey Gallo and his own disintegrating marriage) that sometimes ramble on a few dozen verses too long.

Download: "Sara," "Oh, Sister"

BE CAREFUL

NASHVILLE SKYLINE

COLUMBIA, 1969

★★★



In his first attempt to not be a cultural hero anymore, Dylan quit smoking to sweeten his voice and made a charming, feather-weight mainstream

country album. "Lay, Lady, Lay" was his final Top Ten hit, but the message is clear: "Please stop staring at me."

Download: "I Threw It All Away"

NEW MORNING

COLUMBIA, 1970

★★



Released four months after the *Self-Portrait* train wreck, this is his look-how-sensitive-I-am album. It's full of odes to domestic life and placidity,

some of it lovely, but pretty insubstantial.

Download: "New Morning"

PLANET WAVES

ASYLUM, 1974

★★★



Music mogul David Geffen tried to make Dylan an Eagles-level arena star, and it nearly worked: Rushed out to promote a tour, it was his first No. 1

record. But the only studio album he made with the Band hasn't held up well: dumber-down love songs and good-time rock & roll aren't his forte.

Download: "Forever Young"

STREET LEGAL

COLUMBIA, 1978

★★★★



Divorced, financially troubled and at loose ends, Dylan followed his disciple Springsteen to the land of backup soul chicks and sax.

Sometimes he sings

profound things about confusion and distraction; sometimes he just sounds confused and distracted.

Download: "Changing of the Guards," "New Pony"

FOR FANS ONLY

SELF-PORTRAIT

COLUMBIA, 1970

★



Fed up with being important, Dylan assembled an unappealing double album to make his fans "lukewarm, indifferent and apathetic" about

him: country covers, shitty live versions of old favorites and Simon & Garfunkel's "The Boxer," sung off-key. Run away.

Download: "Copper Kettle"

PAT GARRETT AND BILLY THE KID

COLUMBIA, 1973

★



Lured out of quasi-retirement to score this Sam Peckinpah movie, Dylan didn't bother to come up with any music until he arrived on set. It shows. Beyond the

iconic "Knockin' on Heaven's Door," his soundtrack includes unmemorable instrumentals and three versions of the fourth-rate "Billy."

Download: "Knockin' on Heaven's Door"

DYLAN

COLUMBIA, 1973

★



Nine even more horrible outtakes from *Self-Portrait* and *New Morning*, all covers. Released by Columbia to punish Dylan when he signed to Asylum

Records. Mercifully out of print.

Download: "Lily of the West"

SLOW TRAIN COMING

COLUMBIA, 1979

★★★



When girlfriend Mary Alice Artes hooked him up with the evangelical Christian Vineyard Fellowship, born-again Bob stopped playing his old

songs live and made this Bible-thumping, cliché-embracing album. Beautifully played, though, thanks to Dire Straits guitarist Mark Knopfler.

Download: "Gotta Serve Somebody"

FURTHER READING

TARANTULA

BOB DYLAN

SCRIBNER

★

Dylan's first attempt at a book—a novel? poetry? try "stoned, free-associative babble"—written in 1966 and published five years later, to the author's embarrassment.

SONG AND DANCE MAN III: THE ART OF BOB DYLAN

MICHAEL GRAY

CONTINUUM

★★★★

The third edition (2003) of this fascinating if unwieldy book, which analyzes Dylan's lyrics very closely. The section about their relationship to pre-World War II blues is dazzlingly insightful.

FURTHER VIEWING

DON'T LOOK BACK

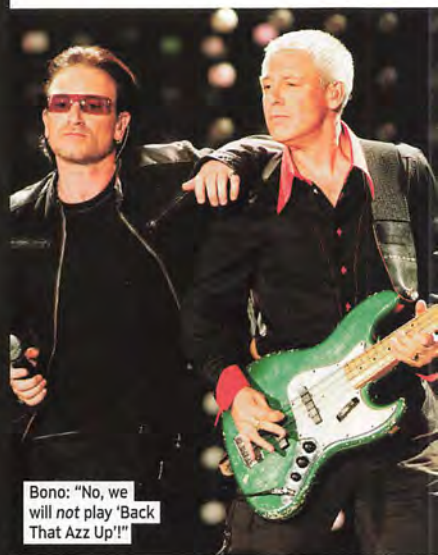
NEW VIDEO GROUP

★★★★★

D.A. Pennebaker's documentary of Dylan's 1965 U.K. tour caught him just as his career was exploding—a brilliant bastard (he's horrible to girlfriend Joan Baez) trying to reconcile hipness with stardom. Reporter: "What are your songs about?" Dylan: "Some of my songs are about four minutes, some are about five minutes."

COMING NEXT MONTH:
PART 2:
IN THE STUDIO,
1980-PRESENT.

Bono combats African debt, severe back pain.



Bono: "No, we will not play 'Back That Azz Up!'"

BOMBS AWAY

THAT BAND FROM THE IPOD ADS

Launching their new tour, U2 lash out at war, dance with dominatrixes

U2

ARROWHEAD POND ARENA, ANAHEIM, CALIFORNIA

APRIL 1, 2005 ★★★★★

"EDGE, THERE'S NO honorable way out of this," Bono says. "You may as well just go ahead and start the next song."

It's the third night of U2's Vertigo tour, and Bono's in a spot. During a lusty version of "Mysterious Ways," the singer reached into the front row and pulled onstage a tall young woman wearing a bargain-basement dominatrix outfit: a tight, black-leather pantsuit topped by a pair of devil horns. It's a great piece of theater, as Bono and new friend Vicki—standing a foot taller than the diminutive star—

strut and dance around the giant horseshoe-shaped ellipse that loops into the middle of the arena floor.

Now the song's over, and Vicki won't leave. This is a peril of fronting U2: Bono's drive to shatter the wall between band and audience, his ceaseless pursuit of Kodak moments, has made him one of rock's great charismatics, but it gets him into trouble too. Few fans can forget his leap into the crowd at Live Aid in 1985, a stunt that reportedly almost broke up the group.

Tonight, no one bats an eye. Bono sits Vicki down onstage, and the band surges into "City of Blinding Lights." When you've been the world's biggest rock & roll act for nearly 20 years, nothing phases you. Not even a fan in

thigh-high boots slumped against the drum riser.

These days, U2 radiate the assurance of a band that has found its comfort zone, toggling between the glam-rock irony of its '90s mid-life crisis and irony-

BONO'S GREAT CHARISMA CAN GET HIM INTO TROUBLE.

free '80s-style messianism—often within the same song. "Love and Peace or Else" begins in militant, thunder-of-the-gods fashion but ends with Bono cheekily donning a bandana and taking a Kodo-style drum solo at an upright kit.

Even the set design evokes U2's dual impulses: stark black-

and-white video images projected on a screen above a stage tricked out with glowing neon, beaded curtains and other glitzy Vegas touches. The crowd is reverent and decidedly all-ages: preschoolers with their Dads, beer-swilling frat boys, hipster-geek types, even Doris Roberts, Ray Romano's *Everybody Loves Raymond* TV mom, who has slightly better seats than *Blender*, dammit.

Few other bands have such consensus appeal. But then, few have stuck around so long. U2's career has lasted long enough for them to have refined, repudiated and then revived a series of personalities. If their last tour was a return to *Joshua Tree*-style rock grandeur, correcting the earlier flirtations with electronica, tonight's concert reaches back to the political advocacy of 20-year-old albums like *War*.

An ecstatic version of "Pride (In the Name of Love)" segues into a Bono sermon about Martin Luther King Jr. and African debt-relief, a theme that continues in "One," when the flags of African nations are projected behind the band. The most pointed

moment comes with a ferocious "Bullet the Blue Sky." The song was written about U.S. military interventions in Central America, but tonight there's little doubt U2 are singing about Iraq, particularly when Bono puts on a blindfold, drops to his knees and pantomimes the posture of an Abu Ghraib prisoner during Edge's

Hendrix-esque solo.

The show has a problem, though, and it's called *How to Dismantle an Atomic Bomb*. Of seven new songs, only the wallowing buzz-toned punk of "Vertigo" stands up to the earlier material. "Sometimes You Can't Make It on Your Own," Bono's elegy for his father, is meant to be the night's requisite Emotional High Point—Bono rips his T-shirt open halfway through—but its melody just can't match "New Year's Day," "Elevation" and other older songs.

Fittingly, the true high point comes last, when U2 drag out their 1983 hymn, "40," which Bono dedicates to the dying Pope John Paul II, whom the singer had met. As the song winds down, Bono drapes a crucifix over his mic stand and, swaying to the music, gives a couple of gentle pelvic thrusts before sauntering offstage. It's classic U2: a little salvation, a little sex, a whole lot of ego and an undeniable tune.

JODY ROSEN

Secretly, Trent Reznor's underwear had My Little Pony on it.



NINE LIVES

The problem child of electronic rock returns with bulked-up muscles and the same old black temper

HOW'D YOU LIKE THE SHOW?

"It was very moving. The stage set by itself brought a tear to my eye! I couldn't believe that they pulled out so many old songs. I loved 'Where the Streets Have No Name.'"

STEPHANIE SCHNEIDER, 32
OMAHA, NEBRASKA



"It was so rockin'. We went to both the San Diego shows; this is our third show. They played a completely different set! They hadn't played 'Mysterious Ways' earlier."

ERIKA FINCH-MCCAFFREY, 27
SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA



"Rock & roll! The stage set was amazing! It was incredible what they did with just lighting. It changed the feeling of every moment, very subtly. And that was nice after they'd gone so huge on past tours."

ROBERT SCOTT, 43
PALOALU VALLEY, HAWAII



NINE INCH NAILS

ASTORIA, LONDON

MARCH 30, 2005 ★★☆☆

WHAT DOES IT take to make Trent Reznor smile? Some bands who disappear for five-year layoffs are forgotten by fans, so the response to Nine Inch Nails' London return at the start of a world tour might have even creased his pallid face with a rare grin: Two shows at the intimate, 2,000-capacity hall sold out in just 14 minutes, and one fan sitting next to *Blender* spent about \$600 on a ticket. The venue tonight looks like the casting call for a club scene in *The Crow 4*. Dress code: any color, so long as it's black.

Reznor first arrived here as the glowering poster-boy of industrial rock, promoting 1989's *Pretty Hate Machine*. Now he's turned 40. The money he once spent on booze, cocaine and smashed keyboards goes to therapist's bills and, by the look of his Vin Diesel biceps, a personal trainer. But encroaching middle age has done nothing to dilute his vast reservoirs of bile or provide him with fresh ways to express it. Sixteen years

after he howled "head like a hole, black as your soul" on the breakthrough single "Head Like a Hole," his new album, *With Teeth*, still offers the kind of sullen spite that gets scrawled on notebooks during detention: "Inside your heart it is black and it's hollow and it's cold."

Maybe the failure of 1999's prog opus *The Fragile* ("Here's my favorite track off the last record that nobody liked," he quips, introducing "Even

Hate Machine's "Terrible Lie" transmute petulance into murderous rage. "Closer," from NIN's 1994 masterpiece *The Downward Spiral*, couches a wish (threat?) to "fuck you like an animal" in hellish carnality. By comparison, the *With Teeth* material lacks bite. Only "The Hand That Feeds," with its New Wave swagger and scissor-sharp hook, draws blood.

If anything encapsulates Reznor's quandary, it's the hate-rock power ballad "Hurt." He's no longer the anguished twentysomething who

MIDDLE AGE HAS NOT DILUTED REZNOR'S BILE.

Deeper") muted Reznor's desire to experiment. The shifting NIN lineup, which now includes former Marilyn Manson bassist Jeordie White and hyperactive ex-Icarus Line guitarist Aaron North, wears regulation black, right down to the instruments, and the stage, as always, resembles a strobe-lit dungeon. But his pretty hate machine is beginning to rust.

Reznor makes sonic mountains out of emotional molehills. The mechanized turbo-metal of the 1992 single "Wish" or the shrieking electro-goth of *Pretty*

wrote the song a decade ago, but he also can't deliver the gravitas Johnny Cash provided on his heart-rending 2002 cover. Out in the crowd, lighters, cell phones and voices fill the air anyway, but the performance doesn't ring true.

The years finally burn away on the obliterating, if premature, finale, "Head Like a Hole." North flings his instrument to the floor and stalks off, leaving feedback yowling and at least one guy wondering if 75 minutes without an encore was worth \$600.

DORIAN LYNKEY



The Z-Boys
prepare to
jump a Buick.

THE GOOD!

DECK HANDS

Escape from the onslaught of megabudget summer behemoths with the best film about the founding fathers of pro skateboarding ... in four years. BY CLARK COLLIS

LORDS OF DOGTOWN

DIRECTED BY Catherine Hardwicke

STARRING Emile Hirsch, Victor Rasuk, John Robinson, Heath Ledger, Rebecca De Mornay

HAD ALL GONE TO plan, Fred Durst's directorial debut would not have been his recent home-made porn epic but rather this dramatized version of the beloved skateboarding documentary *Dogtown* and *Z-Boys*. Any remote chance of the limpbizkit member's member being featured in *Lords of Dogtown* was mercifully removed when he left the project, to be replaced by *Fight Club* auteur David Fincher, who in turn ultimately made way for Catherine Hardwicke, director of the gritty teen drama *Thirteen*.

In truth, you don't need to be

a genius—or even Fred Durst—to realize why adapting a documentary as good, not to mention as recently released, as 2001's *Dogtown* and *Z-Boys* might be problematic. Written and directed by Stacy Peralta, *Z-Boys* related how a bunch of impoverished SoCal teenage surf rats, including Peralta himself, formed the Zephyr skateboarding team and showed the world what could really be done with a plastic board and four urethane wheels. Some of the Zephyr members, or Z-Boys, notably Peralta and Tony Alva, leveraged their talents into fame and fortune, while Jay Adams, probably the group's most talented member, ended up spending a good portion of his adult years behind bars.

With its cool mid-'70s footage, kickass music and

narration from Sean Penn, *Z-Boys*' telling of the story would, frankly, be impossible for *Lords of Dogtown* to improve on. But the pleasures of Hardwicke's film are still abundant, including an equally great Zeppelin- and Sabbath-suffused soundtrack

TONY HAWK MAKES A CAMEO AS AN ASTRONAUT.

and a Peralta-penned script ripe with such authentic-sounding lines as "I don't make toys, bro—I'm a shaper!" That nugget of dialogue is delivered by Heath Ledger, who, with loopy brio, plays surf-shop owner and Zephyr team organizer Skip Engblom as the Hunter S. Thompson of boardmakers. The usually radiant Rebecca De Mornay

gamely grunges down as Jay Adams's space cadet of a mom, living vicariously through her son while working night shifts in a wretched sweatshop. Meanwhile, skateboarding icon Tony Hawk makes a brief but hilarious cameo playing, somewhat surprisingly, an astronaut.

Best of all, though, is the fact that Hardwicke succeeds, as she did with *Thirteen*, in capturing the subtle complexities of teen life as her characters argue, bond, get laid or just violently but impotently rage. Aided by excellent performances from her young cast—particularly John Robinson as Peralta—the result is a movie in which you spend half the time wanting to be the Z-Boys and the other half wanting to send them to bed without any dinner.



THE BAD!

THE SISTERHOOD OF THE TRAVELING PANTS

DIRECTED BY Ken Kwapis

STARRING Amber Tamblyn, America Ferrera, Blake Lively, Alexis Bledel

"We were best friends, about to spend our first summer apart ... But a pair of pants would keep us together!" A *Lord of the Rings* for insecure girls, *The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants* centers on a pair of jeans that offers the film's four variously sized protagonists not the power of invisibility but rather the ability to fit all of them. This hygienically questionable talisman emboldens the quartet as they pursue assorted summer adventures. Suitable only for girls not aware that nicely fitting slacks are available in every clothes emporium in the world.



& THE INDIE!

ENRON: THE SMARTEST GUYS IN THE ROOM

DIRECTED BY Alex Gibney

STARRING Kenneth Lay, Jeff Skilling

Batman Begins is not the only film this month to feature cartoonish supervillains. Alas, the baddies in this documentary about the Enron scandal are all too real. *Smartest Guys* examines how a bunch of corporate geeks built a "house of cards over a pool of gasoline," while ruining innumerable lives in the process. Those still not rushing to see a film that details something called "mark-to-market accounting" may care to note that Arnold Schwarzenegger, a cleverly utilized pop soundtrack and strippers all also feature heavily.

BLENDER APPROVED

The best movies of the past months



SIN CITY

Death, dismemberment and Rosario Dawson in leather.



STAR WARS: EPISODE III

Last chance to imitate Yoda this is.

AND THE REST ...



BATMAN BEGINS

DIRECTED BY Christopher Nolan

STARRING Christian Bale, Liam Neeson

THE PITCH: Pretty much what it says on the package. Bale's young Bruce Wayne learns how to kick perp ass, with help from Neeson's Obi-Wan-ish Henri Ducard. And then he kicks perp ass!

THE VERDICT: With that very serious cast, this should be better than *Batman & Robin* by a factor of, let's say, a squillion.



MR. AND MRS. SMITH

DIRECTED BY Doug Liman

STARRING Brad Pitt, Angelina Jolie, Vince Vaughn

THE PITCH: Bored married couple Pitt and Jolie are, unbeknownst to each other, the world's deadliest assassins. Don't you hate when that happens?

THE VERDICT: To be honest, we're contractually obliged not to dis anything that features Vince Vaughn.



CINDERELLA MAN

DIRECTED BY Ron Howard

STARRING Russell Crowe, Renée Zellweger, Paul Giamatti

THE PITCH: Over-the-hill pugilist Crowe becomes a hero of Depression-era America by beating the crap out of people. Kinda like *Seabiscuit*. But without the horse.

THE VERDICT: It'll be nice to see Crowe putting his fighting ways to use onscreen for a change.

DON'T MISS



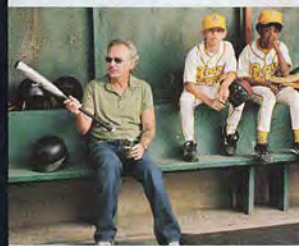
THE LONGEST YARD

DIRECTED BY Peter Segal

STARRING Adam Sandler, Chris Rock, Burt Reynolds

THE PITCH: Incarcerated pro QB Sandler enlists fellow prisoner Rock to put together an inmate team capable of taking on the guards. We're rooting for the guards.

THE PITCH: There's no reason to stay loyal to the Reynolds-starring original, as the Bandit's in this one too.



THE BAD NEWS BEARS

DIRECTED BY Richard Linklater

STARRING Billy Bob Thornton, Greg Kinnear

THE PITCH: Billy Bob inhabits the shoes, and grouchy scowl, of the late Walter Matthau in this remake of the beer-soaked Little League classic.

THE VERDICT: If anyone had to replace Matthau, we're glad it's Thornton, who, between this and *Bad Santa*, must really love seeing kids get hit with baseballs.

DON'T RUSH



THE ADVENTURES OF SHARK BOY AND LAVA GIRL IN 3-D

DIRECTED BY Robert Rodriguez

STARRING David Arquette, Cayden Boyd

THE PITCH: The imaginary superhero friends of a lonely 10-year-old boy come to life.

THE VERDICT: Rodriguez's first three-dimensional effort, *Spy Kids 3-D: Game Over*, gave *Blender* a headache, literally. And with *Sin City* barely out of theaters, he may be spreading himself a bit thin.

LAST GOOD MOVIE YOU SAW?



LIL' KIM, RAPPER

"X2: X-Men United. I should've been in that. I could have been the girl who stole everyone else's power."



Yes, yes, we know—you're Rick James.

BITCHIN'

The newly crowned king of comedy raises the bar with the edgiest material on TV. BY CLARK COLLIS

CHAPPELLE'S SHOW: SEASON 2

PARAMOUNT HOME VIDEO

★★★★★

THE SECOND SEASON of *Chappelle's Show* was promoted by a TV ad in which its star explained that the program's return was entirely due to the fact that Comedy Central had run out of *Reno 911* episodes to repeat. As with so much of Dave Chappelle's comedy, the spot's humor drew strength from being partly true. For while *Chappelle's Show: Season 1* recently became the best-selling DVD of a TV series ever, those early episodes made little impact when first broadcast and now too often look like the work of a man unsure of how far even a cable network would let him go.

Season 2, however, looks like the work of a man who just doesn't care about limits, and is eminently better for it. Take the now legendary "Rick James" episode, a dramatization of cast member Charlie Murphy's deranged early-'80s encounters with the late superfreak. Most comedians, even most ex-stoner comedians, would have thought twice about turning these punch-

line-free tales of a disgraced and half-forgotten rock star into even a sketch. Yet Chappelle opted to break form and make an entire episode out of Murphy's reminiscences—a decision which, combined with nimble writing, the comic's spot-on impersonation of the drug-addled funkateer and the gurgling presence of James himself, made for an instant comedy classic.

Politically, too, *Season 2* has far more bite than its predecessor. "Racial Draft" examines the subject of mixed-race celebrities—Tiger Woods instantly loses all his endorsements after being named officially "black"—while the "Niggars" sketch pres-

**FAR MORE BITE
THAN ITS PREDECESSOR.**

ents a family of white *Leave It To Beaver*-types who have the N-word as their surname ("I'll bet you'll get the finest table a Niggard ever got in this restaurant," Chappelle informs the family's son on encountering him at an eatery). True, there are bum notes, particularly an interminable "What if real life was like the Internet?" sketch. But for most of its duration, this DVD gloriously proves that Rick James was far from the only person involved worthy of being described as a "habitual line-stepper."

THE GUIDE DVDs

ALONE IN THE DARK

LIONS GATE

★

The worst film of the century so far, this execrable videogame adaptation knocks *House of the Dead*, director Uwe Boll's previous execrable videogame adaptation, into second place. Christian Slater is risible as a paranormal investigator battling monsters from another dimension, while Tara Reid proves unconvincing both as an archaeologist and as someone whose first language is English. With fellow *Where Are They Now?* File habitué Stephen Dorff also joining the mayhem, *Alone in the Dark* is less an actual film than a career crypt.

MILLION DOLLAR BABY

WARNER HOME VIDEO

★★★★

Trailer-trash boxing hopeful—played by real-life trailer-trash-turned-Oscar-hog Hilary Swank—is taken under the wing of crusty former pugilist Morgan Freeman and even crustier trainer Clint Eastwood: So far, so female-*Rocky*. But then *Million Dollar Baby* takes a hard, upsetting turn into territory as distant from the traditional feel-good sports movie as it is possible to imagine. With perfectly nuanced performances every which way you look, the end result is a pitch-perfect fusion of sweat-drenched guy movie and three-hankie chick flick.

WHITE NOISE

UNIVERSAL STUDIOS HOME VIDEO

★★

Michael Keaton hears dead people ... all the time! Not, alas, because he's in *Beetlejuice II*, but because he keeps his home entertainment center tuned to static and is thus able to pick up messages from his

dead wife. This he can do thanks to something called Electronic Voice Phenomenon, a supposedly "real" gateway to the deceased that, despite the movie's misleadingly eerie trailer, is rendered singularly uncreepy by this horror whodunit.

STEVE MCQUEEN GIFT SET

MGM HOME ENTERTAINMENT

★★★★★

"Steve McQueen, Steve McQueen," the Drive-By Truckers once sang, "the coolest doggone mother-scratcher on the silver screen." This gift set serves as perfect proof of that, as the late Hollywood icon breaks bulls in *Junior Bonner*, battles bandits in *The Magnificent Seven* and irritates Nazis with his bike-riding skills in *The Great Escape*. Also featured is the original *Thomas Crown Affair*, while extras include a bounty of commentaries, trailers and documentaries.

ASSAULT ON PRECINCT 13

UNIVERSAL STUDIOS HOME VIDEO

★★★★

This surprisingly well-done, if tepidly received, remake of John Carpenter's cult actioner finds burned-out narc Ethan Hawke and suave thug



Seems Uma's got a temper ...



She's cute, but we still miss the orangutan.



Steve McQueen:
Made even getting
scourged by barbed
wire look cool.

Laurence Fishburne reluctantly teaming up to fend off a horde of corrupt cops in a Detroit police station. A souped-up B-movie for sure, but one that pulls some unexpectedly enjoyable rabbits from its hat, including a scene in which pill-popping Hawke and junkie John Leguizamo compare meds.

IN GOOD COMPANY

UNIVERSAL STUDIOS HOME VIDEO

☆☆☆

It seems amazing that Dennis Quaid used to be famous for having the World's Greatest Shit-Eating Grin given that, these days, he spends most of his onscreen time wearing the pained countenance of a chronic migraine sufferer. At least the actor has good reason to look grumpy here as a magazine ad salesman and overly protective father whose new boss, Topher Grace, is young enough to be his son and is dating his daughter, Scarlett Johansson. Another reason for that pinched

expression? The fact that this comedy-drama wastes its topnotch cast by not giving the characters anywhere to go, and taking a long time not getting there.

A TALE OF TWO SISTERS

TARTAN VIDEO

☆☆☆☆

Full of demonic kids, haunted houses and static-filled TV screens, *A Tale of Two Sisters* is, at first glance, a kissing cousin of such other recent Asian frighteners as *The Ring* and *The Grudge*. But this Korean movie, while shorter on outright horror, is much longer on beautifully photographed atmospherics as two sisters return home from an unexplained hospital stay to be tormented by... well, just what they're being tormented by remains unclear until almost the final frame. Suffice to say that this is the kind of movie so reeking with menace that, after a while, even your own wallpaper will start to freak you out.

BLENDER APPROVED

The best DVDs of the past months



MEET THE FOCKERS

UNIVERSAL STUDIOS HOME VIDEO

Dustin Hoffman and Barbra Streisand get "Fockered" in blockbuster comedy sequel.



HOTEL RWANDA

MGM HOME ENTERTAINMENT

Hard-to-watch but essential tale of heroism in the face of atrocity.

MUSIC DVDS

Known helium fiends the Flaming Lips hit the mother lode.



THE FEARLESS FREAKS: THE WONDROUSLY IMPROBABLE STORY OF THE FLAMING LIPS

SHOUT! FACTORY

☆☆☆☆

Comprehensive and utterly engrossing documentary from longtime Flaming Lips collaborator Bradley Beesley that tracks the band's rise from a self-confessed "terrible band with great equipment" to puppet- and blood-loving indie-rock royalty. As befits its subject matter, the result is in turns brutally honest (a late-'90s Steven Drozd ruminates on losing everything he owns to heroin while preparing another fix) and joyously surreal (Wayne Coyne persuades some small children to re-enact the time he was held up at gunpoint while working at a Long John Silver's).

CLARK COLLIS

FREESTYLE

THE ART OF RHYME

PALM PICTURES

☆☆☆☆

Funny that rap purists begrudge mainstreamers for saying nothing—as this doc, full of live footage and interviews proves, many MCs in hip-hop's far left freestyling wing don't say much either. Some here achieve a fierce dazzle (indie luminary Wordsworth and Biggie, aged 17)—but most spew unmemorable, agitated heaps of syllables. JONAH WEINER

EDGEPLAY:

A FILM ABOUT THE RUNAWAYS

IMAGE ENTERTAINMENT

☆☆☆☆

Part riot-grrrl pioneers, part underage pop-vixen godmothers, the Runaways' trailblazing didn't come without a cost. Bassist Vickie Blue's frequently disturbing feature-length documentary—Joan Jett is conspicuously absent, but Lita Ford thankfully is not—vividly details intraband schisms and trysts and, most intriguingly, alleges sexual abuse by the

band's militaristic, exploitation-happy svenigali, Kim Fowley. LAUREN HARRIS

MADE IN SHEFFIELD: THE BIRTH OF ELECTRONIC POP

SHEFFIELD VISION

☆☆☆

In 1979, a culturally barren steel town in northern England became the birthplace of synth pop. This succinct documentary rounds up those who made it (The Human League, Heaven 17, ABC, Pulp) and those who didn't (Artery, 2.3) to explain how it happened. Big on wry, obscure English humor and close-ups of keyboards. DORIAN LYNSEY

STING

BRING ON THE NIGHT

A&M

☆☆☆

A documentary ostensibly about the recording of his first solo album and subsequent tour, the real purpose of this Michael Apter-directed film seems to be showing how comfortable Sting is hanging out with his backing band of all-black American jazzers. Unfortunately, two decades on, he just comes across as irritatingly pretentious, although the live material does feature a cracking version of "Roxanne." CLARK COLLIS

JAY-Z

FADE TO BLACK

PARAMOUNT HOME VIDEO

☆☆☆

In November 2003, Jay-Z threw himself a retirement bash at his hometown venue, a sold-out Madison Square Garden. But by positioning itself as rap's answer to *The Last Waltz*, this cameo-studded film can't help but pale in comparison. While Martin Scorsese's definitive concert movie featured performances and interviews that enriched the Band's legacy, this standard-issue cash-in will, at best, serve as a footnote to an exemplary career that, let's face it, isn't actually over. LAUREN HARRIS

Thurston Moore practices for big staring contest.



TAPE HEADS

An elaborately crafted homage to the homemade cassette, by indie rock's self-appointed arbiter of cool **BY STEVE KANDELL**

MIX TAPE: THE ART OF CASSETTE CULTURE

Edited by Thurston Moore

☆☆☆ RIZZOLI BOOKS, \$23

AMONG THE BELOVED institutions digital music has been accused of destroying—record stores, Lars Ulrich's popularity, the entire music industry—less documented, if no less lamented, is the homemade mix tape. Sonic Youth frontman/aesthete Moore rounds up a wide array of hipsters to wax rhapsodic about the greatest cassettes they ever made or received, be they tools of seduction, sources of inspiration or crude artifacts from a mis-spent youth.

Much like a mix tape itself, the essays here are something of a hodgepodge. Dean Ware-

ham of Galaxie 500 and Luna champions at length the cassette as an integral part of his most significant relationships as well as his creative process, while designer Kate Spade's testimony is all of one sentence. Mike Watt shows off a tape from the Flaming Lips' Steven Drozd exposing a mutual love of Glen Campbell's "Wichita Lineman."

Most entries are accompanied by the actual covers of the tapes discussed, and it's in the attention to the cover art and hand-scrawled song listings that the book's central conceit becomes evident: Rather than merely serve as a makeshift collection of songs committed to cheap magnetic tape, these were often pieces of artwork unto themselves, offering a personal touch that no iTunes playlist could ever provide.



BLENDER APPROVED

The best books of the past months



THE ROUGH GUIDE TO HIP-HOP

Edited by Peter Shapiro
ROUGH GUIDES, \$25

Everything you need to know about rap, and plenty of things you don't.



THE ROCK SNOB'S DICTIONARY

By David Kamp and Steven Daly
BROADWAY BOOKS, \$13

A handy reference tome for the most pretentious pop ephemera.

THE GUIDE BOOKS ★ CROSSWORD

INNOCENT WHEN YOU DREAM

THE TOM WAITS READER

Edited by Mac Montandon/Foreword by Frank Black

☆☆☆☆ THUNDER'S MOUTH PRESS, \$17

Since Tom Waits began churning out rough and lovely junkyard soul records in the early '70s, journalists have been trying to figure out what makes him tick. *Innocent When You Dream* collects 30 years' worth of attempts to bottle Waits's brand of smoke, but the question of

"Who is he, really?" is never answered. Is he a true barroom poet? A poseur with a good line? Waits sums himself up best in a 1975 *NME* interview reprinted here: "I'm just a rumor." **GABE SORIA**



PASSION IS A FASHION

THE REAL STORY OF THE CLASH

By Pat Gilbert

☆☆☆ DA CAPO, \$19

This is hardly the first Clash book, but it may be the most exhaustively researched—former *Mojo* editor Gilbert seems to have interviewed everyone who ever tuned a guitar or rolled a joint for the legendary punks. True, he also logged time with the band itself, including the late Joe Strummer, but there is still the sense of a career viewed



from the wings. The result is an authoritative guide packed with such outlandish tales as the time bassist Paul Simonon refused to attend a management meeting until provided with a rabbit suit to wear. **CLARK COLLIS**

THE THRILL OF IT ALL

THE STORY OF BRYAN FERRY AND ROXY MUSIC

By David Buckley

☆☆☆ CHICAGO REVIEW PRESS, \$18

In proclaiming Roxy Music to be the first—and possibly the best—of the art-rock bands, biographer Buckley presents Ferry as an obsessively stylish artiste, aloof and prone to musical dead ends. Replete with anecdotes about Ferry's skirt-chasing exploits, which among other things included losing girlfriend Jerry Hall to a persistent Mick Jagger, *Thrill* acknowledges the debt owed to Roxy Music by both early punks and by '80s pop idols like Duran Duran who made music in Ferry's image. **ANDREW BAKER**



WORDS AND MUSIC

A HISTORY OF POP IN THE SHAPE OF A CITY

By Paul Morley

☆☆ UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA PRESS, \$25

Freud—or was it Oprah?—said society is founded on the sublimation of the sex drive into productive labor. Paul Morley, longtime Brit music journo, is intensely smart and has listened to bushels of music. Also, he wants quite urgently to shag Kylie Minogue. Sublimate, sublimate, scribble and scribble and voila! A lengthy history of bubblegum pop in the form of a barely coherent, list-filled rant. Sitting squarely at the crossroads of Lester Bangs and "She Bangs," the book is a lot of work for little payoff. **RENE VIENET**



THE BEST PART OF A BIG BOOK!

DRUG-ADDLED THESPIAN DAVID CARRADINE ACCOSTS BYRDS FRONTMAN **GENE CLARK** ... AT HIS MEMORIAL SERVICE.

"Carradine says, 'You cocksucker,' and grabs Gene by the lapels. When you pull somebody up from a coffin and they have nothing for guts, they bend higher up ... And Carradine goes, 'You pissed on my daughter when she was 13.'"

From *Mr. Tambourine Man: The Life and Legacy of the Byrds' Gene Clark*, by John Einarson, copyright 2005, Backbeat Books



Portrait of a Man With Bowl Haircut.



WIN THIS THINGY

Trick out your home theater with wi-fi goodness! Just fill out the right answers to this month's crossword puzzle for a chance to win a Belkin Pure AV Remote TV, which can beam audio and video from room to room.



PENCIL ME IN

Hey, it's *Blender*'s crossword! Starring 9 across!

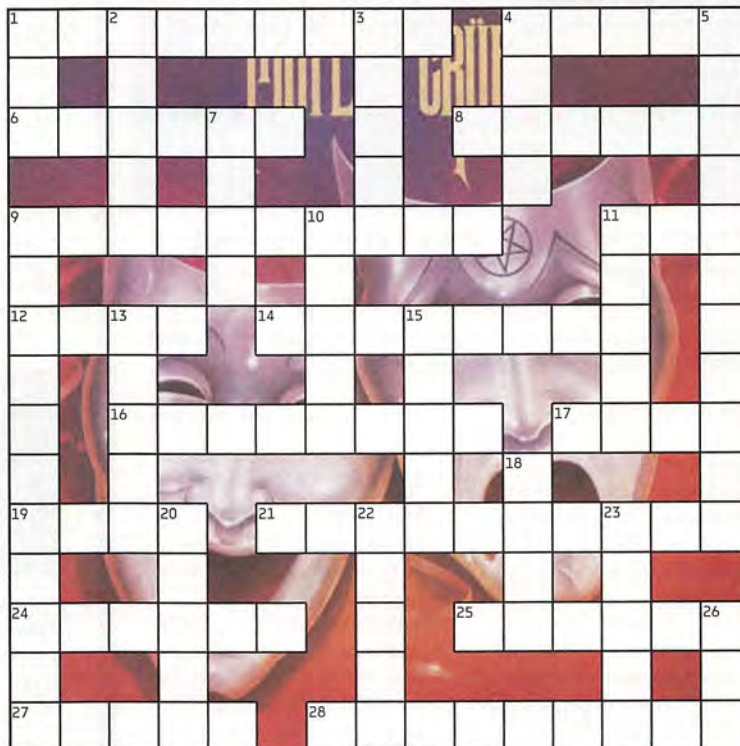
BY BRENDAN QUIGLEY

ACROSS

- 1 Bollywood-tinged No. 1 50 Cent song of 2005
- 4 Band on the dark side of the moon, for short
- 6 C&W's Tim who teamed up with Nelly on "Over and Over"
- 8 Bob Marley's ubiquitous greatest-hits collection
- 9 Recently reunited metal heathens
- 11 Division that Interpol is accused of ripping off
- 12 Tom Sawyer's favorite band
- 14 Diana Ross-led girl group, with "The"
- 16 They were smashing in the '90s
- 17 He's a loser, baby, so why don't you kill him?
- 19 Ric Ocasek's '80s vehicles
- 21 Reformed boy bander turned Super Bowl villain
- 24 Joey, Dee Dee, Johnny and Tommy's adopted surname
- 25 Veteran blues guitarist Boz
- 27 "Helpless" singer Neil
- 28 Prog-revival outfit with the 2005 album *Frances the Mute*

DOWN

- 1 "___ on Feel the Noize" (Quiet Riot)
- 2 Sister Christian's Ranger
- 3 New ____, of "Blue Monday" fame
- 4 Bass player on "Under the Bridge"
- 5 "Gasolina" rapper
- 7 Van Halen of, um, Van Halen
- 9 The best-selling female performer of the '90s
- 10 Lil Jon produces it
- 11 McCartney with a beautiful soul
- 13 Word that can precede chunk, grass and tramp to make band names
- 15 14 across's genre (three words)
- 18 Jazzman Dolphy
- 20 Texas indie band with new album *Gimme Fiction*
- 22 Beatle illness, prevalent in mid-'60s
- 23 Stefani's "Love ___ Music Baby"
- 26 The Specials specialized in it



→ Send your completed puzzle to *Blender* Puzzle Contest, 1040 Avenue of the Americas, 22nd floor, New York, NY 10018



ROUND 3 JOEY SANTIAGO VS. BLENDER

POP STARS aren't known as cerebral types, so *Blender* challenged the whole lot of 'em to a game of chess, hoping for an easy, ego-boosting victory. Each month, a different star will make a move, and we'll respond until we finally capture that crowny-looking doodad. Pixies guitarist Joey Santiago mans the board this month. Rock us, Joe!

JOEY'S MOVE

"PAWN TO C4."

BLENDER'S MOVE

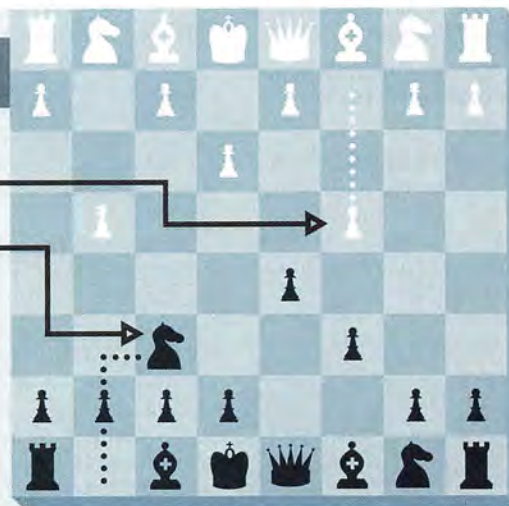
"KNIGHT TO F6."

Former U.S. Chess Federation president **Don Schultz** says:

(ON JOEY) "Good idea: Immediately go after black's center pawn."

(ON BLENDER) "Excellent move: over-protects the queen pawn and puts a double attack on white's pawn on G4."

COME BACK NEXT MONTH AND SEE IF WE'VE LEARNED WHAT A **ROOK** IS!



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PSP, I LOVE YOU

Sony's new handheld is the year's must-have gizmo—**MEMPHIS BLEEK** tells you whether to believe the hype. BY GABESORIA

THE HOTTEST THING to hit videogaming since, well, ever, Sony's PSP is flying off store shelves nationwide, inspiring iPod-esque levels of gadget-cult devotion in the process. When *Blender* asked Roc-A-Fella artist Memphis Bleek to test drive the PSP, the gameaholic rapper jumped at the chance. "I would call my grandmother for a loan to get this," he drools when we hand him the sleek, handheld game/movie/MP3 player. And he predicts that the American educational system will be no match for the PSP's addictive charms: "Kids is gonna have a lot of detention!"

NEED FOR SPEED UNDERGROUND: RIVALS EA

☆☆☆

BLENDER SAYS: High-speed illegal auto racing, with hot cars and a bumping soundtrack. **BLEEK SAYS:** "The whip skills is nice, like I'm running from the police! I ain't gonna lie; I won't play it on a regular basis, but if I'm waiting on a flight or some-

thing, this would definitely keep my attention."

SPIDER-MAN 2 ACTIVISION

☆☆☆☆☆

BLENDER SAYS: An adaptation of last summer's hit movie about the buggy superhero.

BLEEK SAYS: "This is why Spider-Man's the dude. I think I need this. Let me buy this from you. I'd definitely rock with this."

NBA SONY

☆☆

BLENDER SAYS: Professional hoops simulation featuring your favorite seven-foot millionaires. **BLEEK SAYS:** "I ain't feeling this. They way they have the buttons, the way you shoot ain't good. And the men are too little. It don't look like I'm on parquet, it looks like I'm in the nosebleed seats. C'mon, let me get another game, 'cause this is not it."

TWISTED METAL: HEAD-ON SONY

☆☆☆☆☆

BLENDER SAYS: Heavily armed vehicles square off in deadly destruction derbies.

BLEEK SAYS: "I'd play this game all day. When we in traffic, there's some people, I just want to blow their car up. Twist their metal. Word up, man. This joint is hot, you can't front on it. Everybody loves destruction!"



THE GUIDE GAMES



RAZE'S HELL

MAJESCO, XBOX

☆☆☆

If you've ever sensed evil behind the smiling eyes of your little sister's teddy bears, *Raze's Hell* was made with you in mind. Your enemies are a cult of cuteness called the Kewlettes, fuzzy little murderers who want nothing more than to flatline anything that isn't tooth-decayingly sweet, starting with you. The gameplay isn't anything exemplary, but boy oh boy, is eviscerating machine-gun wielding plushies a treat and a half.



RED NINJA

VIVENDI UNIVERSAL, PS2, XBOX

☆☆☆☆

Your father's been killed before your eyes and you were rescued by a kindly master assassin. What's a little girl in feudal Japan to do? Grow up to become a kimono-wearing, panty-revealing whirlwind of silent ninja death, of course. A film-worthy plot, stunning visuals and fluid gameplay make this an instant classic, and Kurenai, the game's slinky, murderous protagonist, dishes up sex and mayhem with cool versatility.



STAR WARS: EPISODE III—REVENGE OF THE SITH

LUCASARTS, PS2, XBOX

☆☆☆

Videogame adaptations of movies usually work out as well as movie adaptations of videogames—which is to say, not very. But *Sith's* origin as a big-screen action extravaganza helps it survive the downsizing. The game won't win any awards for originality—you'll be jumping and fighting and learning stilted bits of wisdom—but as somber, Jedi-killing games go, it's currently the top of its class.



ENTHUSIA

KONAMI, PS2

☆☆☆

Car simulators are like the calculus of videogaming—understood by few and thought by many to be deadly dull. While *Enthusia* does have many snoozestastic features only a lonely gearhead could care about, it manages to incorporate true playability. Hundreds of historical, contemporary and concept cars are present for you to run ragged on tracks of varying difficulty. Consistently entertaining, despite your better judgment.

BLENDER APPROVED

The best games of the past months



SUPER MONKEY BALL DELUXE

SEGA, PS2, XBOX

We love playing with monkey balls. We also love playing with this quirky puzzle-action game.



MLB 2K5

ESPN 2K SPORTS, PS2, XBOX

So true to the sport, you can score "clear" from your steroid dealer in the clubhouse. (OK, not that true.)

THIS IS NOT A CAR.

It's your source of pride.

It's your hard-earned cash.

It's your spare time.

It's your statement.

It's your reputation.

IT'S EVERYTHING.



BUT LOSE JUST ONCE AND YOU LOSE EVERYTHING.

BUILD YOUR CAR. BUILD YOUR CREW. PUT IT ALL ON THE LINE.

You build your car by winning. Putting your cash back in and using trillions of different performance and design combos. Then you build a crew of support cars, guys to watch your back. And if you've got the guts to risk everything you've built, you race online for the ultimate prize: the other guy's ride.



Juiced



PlayStation 2



Lyrics
Mild Language
Simulated Gambling

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ELVIS'S LITTLE GIRL IS ALL GROWN UP: THE 37-YEAR-OLD POP SINGER IS A SHRINK-HATING SCIENTOLOGIST, AN UNREPENTANT NAIL-BITER AND A METICULOUS BIKINI WAXER. WHICH NEARLY ANSWERS THE QUESTION ...

BY ROB TANNENBAUM
PHOTOGRAPHY BY F. SCOTT SCHAFER

WHO DOES LISA MARIE PRESLEY THINK SHE IS?

FOR YOUR SELF-PORTRAIT, YOU DREW A MIDDLE FINGER. WHY?

I don't draw well. The only things I can draw are that and a cat's ass, so it was one or the other.

SO WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME YOU GAVE SOMEBODY THE FINGER?

The other day, at an Easter party. [Laughs] It was one of my best friends, and that's all we do: insult each other all day long. My friends and I are constantly bantering. "Go fuck yourself." "Fuck your mother." Things like that.

OTHER THAN CURSING, WHAT PERSONAL HABIT DO YOU HAVE THAT PEOPLE FIND ANNOYING?

Probably biting my [mumbles].

BITING YOUR WHAT?

Biting my nails.

OH. IT SOUNDED LIKE YOU SAID, "BITING MY ASS."

[Laughs] There's that too. It's a real drag when the family's around and I start biting my ass. No, I bite my fingernails. It's terrible. They look like toes.

LET'S SEE. EWW, GROSS. THEY LOOK LIKE REALLY UGLY TOES. WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME YOU PRAYED?

There was a time in 1996 when I was having chronic panic attacks. They were brought on by my divorce [from Michael Jackson]. And I probably begged somebody to make it stop, because it was pretty bad. It took a little while, but ultimately they stopped.

WHAT ARE YOU LIKE WHEN YOU'RE DRUNK?

Very social and chit-chatty. The complete opposite of how I am when I'm sober! [Laughs] I can carry on a conversation forever, tell people how much I love them ... I'm a happy drunk.

WHO DO YOU HATE MOST IN THE WORLD?

Psychiatrists. I just think that they are a direct cause for the demise of human beings. I disagree with the whole thing: pointing out people's bad points, focusing on them, then giving them drugs that they can't get off and that don't get to the root of the problem.

DO YOU WORRY ABOUT OLD AGE?

Yeah, it makes me paranoid. The body starts doing really weird shit after 35. Like, I'll throw my back out now. And hangovers are worse.

WAX OR SHAVE?

Wax, because then the hair stays away longer. You get used to the pain. I'm a maniac about the bikini area—if there's any hair, I want it gone. I'm very anal about that.

HAVE YOU EVER BEEN MISTAKEN FOR SOMEONE ELSE?

My mother. People think my mom's me and I'm her. They just know it's a Presley—one of 'em.

DESCRIBE YOURSELF PHYSICALLY.

Short. I am short. That's all that comes to mind. Women are better off petite—it just seems more feminine.

IF YOU COULD CHANGE YOUR BODY, WHAT WOULD BE DIFFERENT?

God, where do I start? I'd have a twelve-pack and fuller lips—that model-fake kind of full. I'd never have surgery on my face, by the way. I've never seen that work out for anybody. You should leave your face alone.

ELVIS PRESLEY OR FRANK SINATRA?

Gimme a break. [Laughs] Elvis Presley.

WHY?

Why?! Because. Many, many reasons. I happen to be more partial to his voice. And him.

ARE YOU A GENIUS?

Anyone who says they're a genius is an asshole. You can be one, but you can't say you're one. And by that, I'm not saying I am one.

AH. SO YOU THINK YOU'RE A GENIUS.

That is not what I'm saying! Don't you print that. That's for other people to think about, not me.

WHAT DO YOU SPEND TOO MUCH MONEY ON?

My staff, and 24-hour security.

WHAT KIND OF MUSIC DO YOU HATE MOST?

What's happening right now on Top 40 radio. It just seems very Stepford to me, and a little soul-less.

ARE YOU A GOOD GIRL OR A BAD GIRL?

It depends on what day you're asking me that question. I can behave very badly if I want to.

LAST QUESTION: WHAT DOES YOUR SELF-PORTRAIT SAY ABOUT WHO YOU ARE?

I am a middle finger.

YOU'RE A HUMAN MIDDLE FINGER?

A human middle finger, exactly. God, yeah. [BLENDER]

SKIRT BY SERIOUS TIGHTS BY WOLFORD SHOES BY CONVERSE
T-SHIRT BY JUICY COUTURE
VINTAGE T-SHIRT BY JUNKFOOD
JEWELRY BY LORI RODKIN



STUPID HOT! 2004 PHOTO YEARBOOK

BLENDER

THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO MUSIC AND MORE

WOMAN OF THE YEAR

GWEN STEFANI

ALL HAIL THE QUEEN!

DOWNLOAD SPECIAL!

THE 100 GREATEST SONGS OF 2004

DECEMBER 2004



SUPERFREAKY!
THE LAST DAYS (AND NIGHTS) OF RICK JAMES

TOMMY LEE
"PORN STARS RUINED MY MARRIAGE!"

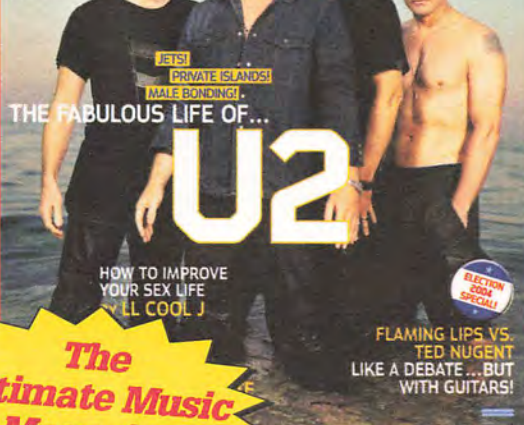
PLUS
EMINEM
KANYE WEST
U2
PRINCE

20 MOST AWESOMELY BAD SONGS
OF 2004

EXCLUSIVE! THE SIMPSONS MEET THE OLSENS

BLENDER

THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO MUSIC AND MORE



THE FABULOUS LIFE OF...

U2

HOW TO IMPROVE YOUR SEX LIFE
BY L. COOL J

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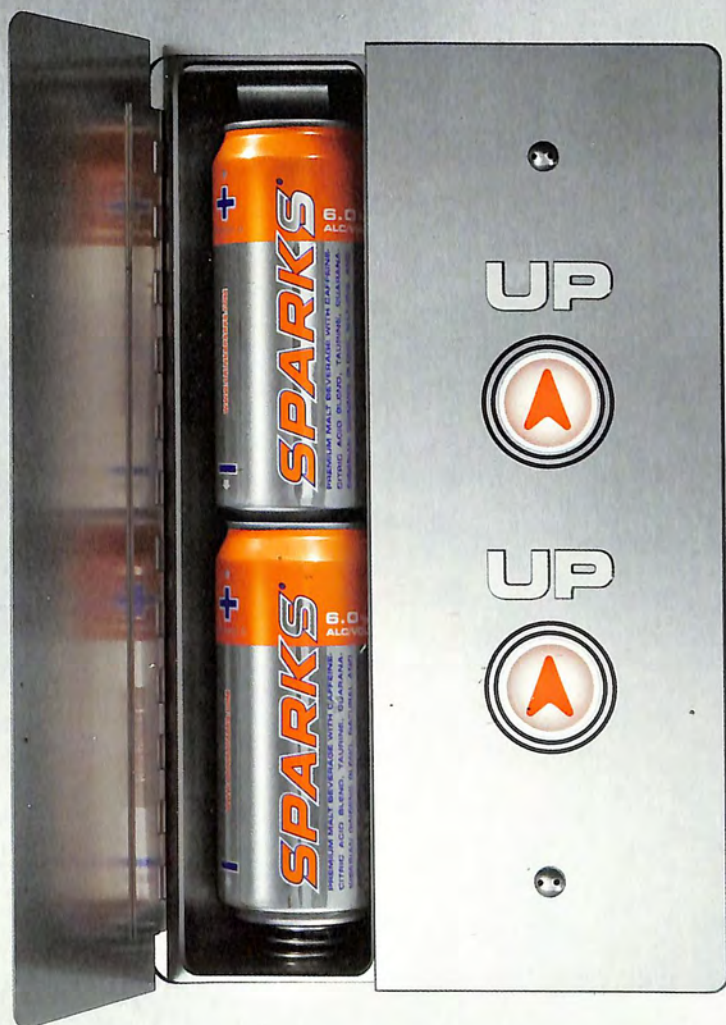
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